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NEGLECTED THE STUDY OF GRAMMAR.

For the Use of the Artisan and Mechanic.

BY JUSTIN BRENNAN.

FOURTEENTH



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LONDON:
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NOTICE FROM THE PUBLISHERS.

FROM the numerous inquiries for BRENNAN'S "COMPOSITION AND PUNCTUATION," the publishers are induced to issue a new edition. The eleventh and last, though an unusually large impression of it was thrown off, has been long since exhausted, and is now completely out of print. The present edition has the advantage of being superintended by the author, who has carefully revised it throughout, and made numerous additions and alterations that much enhance its utility. Yet, though the work now contains more matter than hitherto, the publishers, yielding to the prevalent desire for cheapness, have considerably reduced the price; and they feel confident, therefore, that this edition, so greatly improved, will be very acceptable to all who need assistance in unambitious composition, or in *serviceable* punctuation.

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COMPOSITION AND PUNCTUATION

FAMILIARLY EXPLAINED.

CHAPTER I.

PLAN OF THE WORK.

I HAVE been induced to write this treatise, not with a design of superseding any other, on the subject of composition, but because I have seen none that condescends to take my humble route. I consider, therefore, that I have the field to myself. Seeing an unclaimed spot, which is a thing not to be found every day, I have taken possession—nor will I give up the ground, until some abler pen shall warn me that I have not a good title.

My object is, to instruct those who know how to read and write, but who are unacquainted with grammar. I propose, questionable as it may appear, to show such persons how they may compose sentences of which they may not, at least, be ashamed, and how they may express meaning intelligibly, without exciting a laugh at their expense.

Such is the task that I have undertaken. There are many thousands, who, though very intelligent and witty, believe grammar to be so uncommonly difficult, that they will make no attempt to learn, what they feel is beyond their attainment. They say "that all the world could not beat grammar into their heads—that they had, when at school, learned verbs, participles, and the other parts of speech, but that they never did, nor never could, understand them."

When men take up such notions, it is not easy to seduce them into study. They are then afraid to write, because they are terrified about all that they hear of grammatical

errors. They think that composition, without grammar, must be an absurd attempt, and thus we are, to my own knowledge, deprived of many useful essays—nay even of books. Several of those individuals who shine in conversation by the originality and brilliancy, and the weight and accuracy, of their observations, are afraid to touch a pen, through a fear of the alarming requisites that composition demands.

Now, if we cannot prevail on such persons to study grammar, would it not be a meritorious attempt, to induce some of them to commit their thoughts to paper? The gratification of seeing themselves in print might inspire confidence, and arm them with fortitude to combat their ill-founded apprehensions—to look that science in the face which appears so appalling. If ever this were desirable, it is now, when we have grammars so simplified compared with those out of which they vainly strove to learn in their younger days.

The failure of such persons arises from three causes:—

FIRST. Their over anxiety to express themselves clearly, and to include all possible contingencies and exceptions, before they finish a sentence.

SECONDLY. Their fear of repetitions of the same word.

THIRDLY. Their not duly considering the previous part of a sentence, which often produces ludicrous errors, such as making a horse or a house appear to do the business of a man.

To these I might add a fourth—their terror of punctuation, which seems to present insurmountable difficulties.

I propose to explain, chiefly by examples, these three causes of failure, and to show the illiterate how they may easily punctuate their writings. If any of the learned happen to take up my book, I request that they will recollect, that it is not addressed to them. It has little to say to scholars or men of education, for, though they may, occasionally, find some hints not beneath their consideration, its chief pretension is, to instruct those who have not the advantage of grammatical knowledge.

CHAPTER II.

FIRST CAUSE OF FAILURE IN COMPOSITION.

THIS, as described, is the bane of ordinary writing, and, until we can find an antidote, we may despair of being read with pleasure, or even with common patience. Our work, whatever it be, is soon thrown aside. People do not like to wade through long-winded sentences—they will not take the trouble of connecting their various members, so as to arrive at the sense. The consequence is, that all those efforts at clearness operate as fatally as obscurity, except in a letter or law-document, which our interest may compel us to read.

Such anxiety for clearness of expression produces, necessarily, those protracted sentences that are so fearful to the general reader. Besides, it leads to the use of frequent parentheses, which should be avoided by all who aspire above the lowest class of writers. In latter times, the parenthesis has fallen into well-merited contempt, and it is now almost confined to the persons for whom I have composed this treatise. Indeed, it should never be introduced, except on very extraordinary occasions, or for the purpose of indispensable reference, and, as it might be unsafe to let my *pupils* make those distinctions, the best advice that I can give them is, never to bring it into any composition whatever. The general school definition is, that it is something that may be passed without injury to sense or connection, but I protest against a doctrine so destructive to good writing. Never suppose that you write anything that could be safely omitted.

The following is a sample of this parenthetical writing:—

I received yours of the 25th ult. (tho' I must observe it did not come to hand, as you supposed until the 6th inst. owing to the bearer, Mr. Jackson being detained by the heavy snows falling these some days past) and I now take the first opportunity business affords (which thank God is very good lately) of answering it, and which I shall do with as much particularity and attention to all your different commands as any spare time (which as I said before is now very agreeably contracted by the increased business) will permit me, and I think you may expect them all done in three weeks or thereabouts

(for it may be a few days more) and then you will be tolerably provided for, for the remainder of the winter, which (as you justly observe) promises to be severer than most others in our memories.

What a precious rigmarole is here! But perhaps you will say, "Well then, I shall take away the parentheses, and then it will read better." Not at all. That could effect no improvement, for they are still there in substance, and the mere omission of the marks would signify nothing. You must endeavour to write, as much as possible, without those *understood* parentheses—if not, you will never attain to brevity or clearness. On due examination we shall find, that parentheses generally show our want of capacity, and very ordinary capacity too, for bringing into a better place something that we do not wish to omit altogether. Some excuse must be allowed, however, for the influence of old authority. The examples of former teachers are only partially exploded, and too many follow the *spirit* of the explanation in our old spelling-books, "I gave all I have (except my watch) to Alexander." What an illustration! So then an exception, that may prove of great importance, is only a thing "that may be omitted without injury to the sense!" Why, according to this licence, we may put whatever we please in parentheses.

There is nothing like analysis for coming at the truth, and I shall, therefore, examine this more critically. It is admitted that sentences may be transposed, by which is meant that we may, generally, place the members otherwise than in the natural or regular order. Suppose we exercise this privilege with the example before us, and begin with the exception, see how the matter stands:—

(Except my watch) I give all I have to Alexander.

Here is a fair dissection of this parenthesis, for, if it be one, it must retain its character under every change of place, and yet I hardly think, that Fenning or Dilworth themselves would have allowed it to commence a sentence. From this you may see how liable to absurdity parentheses are, and how necessary it is to avoid them. Yet, though their injury to good writing is now pretty well known and acknowledged, they are not sufficiently reprobated. Mr. Murray's directions

for their management, though not at all exceptionable, are the best guide that I have seen. Their frequent use is the chief reason why our old English writers seem so tiresome. Wishing to appear very correct and exact, they could hardly make an assertion, without lugging into one part or other of the sentence, some qualification or exception of little importance. As far as my observation has gone, Dryden appears to be the first who emancipated our style from this insipid prolixity. His dedications are, I think, freer than any other prose compositions of the same age, from those defects under consideration, for though Lord Bacon and some others wrote before him, with great strength of construction, their English is now, unavoidably, too antiquated for our present purpose. The parenthesis, whether short or extended, marked or understood, is plainly a digression in a sentence, and it should always, unless very concise, be transferred to the next, or so placed as to read smoothly, and to glide at once into our conception. Dean Swift was rather sparing of parentheses, though they were much used in his time. He seems indeed inclined to ridicule them, as appears from the following passage in his letter to Dr. Sheridan, dated Clonfert, August 3, 1723 :—

Quilca (let me see) you see I can (if I please) make parentheses (as well as others) is about a hundred miles from Clonfert.

But, though I have commended Dryden, here is a sentence, from his Dedication of the *Æneid*, upon which my eye has just glanced. It is newly punctuated by Carey, and, were it not for that assistance, I believe it would be very difficult to find out the sense :—

Statius—who, through his whole poem, is noted for want of conduct and judgment—instead of staying, as he might have done, for the death of Capaneus, Hippomedan, Tydeus, or some other of his seven champions (who are all heroes alike), or more properly for the tragical end of the two brothers, whose exequies the next successor had leisure to perform when the siege was raised, and in the interval betwixt the poet's first action and his second—went out of his way, as it were on prepense malice to commit a fault. For he took his opportunity to kill a royal infant, &c.

Were it not for Mr. Carey's judicious punctuation, it would be a study to comprehend this sentence. The first and last dashes show us that Statius went, &c., and all the intermediate part is a monstrous suspension, to be read, I suppose,

in an abated tone of voice, as the spelling-books direct. Mr. Carey might, perhaps, have done well to omit the second dash, but it is evident that he had some vexation in trying to give the thing a *readable* form.

Now, with great deference, I submit the following construction of this ill-built sentence as strictly preserving Dryden's intention and meaning, and enabling us to read it divested of obscurity or trouble :—

Statius, through his whole poem, is noted for want of conduct and judgment. Without any obvious necessity, he stays for the death of Capaneus, Hippomedan, Tydeus, or some other of his seven champions, who are all heroes alike. It may, indeed, be more properly said, that he waits for the tragical end of the two brothers, whose exequies, the next successor had leisure to perform, when the siege was raised, and in the interval betwixt the poet's first and second action. He therefore went out of his way, as it were on prepenes malice, to commit a fault. For he took his opportunity to kill a royal infant, &c.

The greatest celebrity will not now save an author who writes in a tedious or drawling manner. People will not read—they will, at most, only skim over such composition. Though the following example is from the pen of Cowley, I only ask yourself, whether you would like to go through a book consisting chiefly of such sentences? I cannot doubt your answer, and I therefore entreat you to consider, that you cannot expect that we should read your long-winded writing, however interesting may be the subject. It has gone, irrecoverably, out of fashion, and it is vain to oppose the present, and most certainly improved, taste in the style of composition :—

But if any man be so unlearned as to want entertainment of the little intervals of accidental solitude, which frequently occur in almost all conditions (except the very meanest of the people, who have business enough in the very provisions of life) it is truly a great shame both to his parents and himself; for a very small portion of any ingenious art will stop up all those gaps of our time; either music, or painting, or designing, or chymistry, or history, or gardening, or twenty other things will do it usefully and pleasantly; and if he happen to set his affections on poetry (which I do not advise him immediately) that will overdo it; no wood will be thick enough to hide him from the importunities of company or business, which would abstract him from his beloved.

As I hope that you are not weak enough to think, that any improvement can be effected without *some* trouble, I shall now, before you receive my assistance, recommend as a task,

to put the *parenthetical* example into something of a reasonable form. Take a pen, and try to write the whole sense or substance into six separate sentences. If you cannot do this, try five, four, three—even two will make a great amendment. This is what you should do upon every occasion. When you write a letter or anything else, you generally make a rough sketch first, and you then copy it out afresh without blots or interlineations. But your great anxiety is about words or spelling, and you neglect that most important object—the proper division of your thoughts. You are asking this and that person, is not such a word better than another, is such an expression good grammar, or, is not such a word sometimes spelled two ways? Those inquiries may be proper, but rely upon it that your first effort should be, to break all your long-winded sentences into small portions. This is the primary grand step to respectable composition. Without any scholastic learning, it will enable you, generally speaking, to write grammatically, or at least with much fewer errors than you would otherwise make. Keep this important fact in mind. I assure you that it is much truer than you imagine, and I shall now put it in a plainer and more convincing point of view.

In the works of our best authors, grammatical faults occasionally appear. Those are, of course, not from ignorance—they are generally ascribed to inadvertence. But where do you think that they are almost invariably found? In long sentences. Now, ought not this, at once, to decide your conviction? Since a Lowth, a Blair, a Johnson, can thus make false concords, must it not be impossible for you to avoid them, in similar circumstances?

Suppose that you have occasion to write, "I intend to go to the country next week, but I shall take care to execute your commands first. Some of them are, no doubt, troublesome, but, with John's assistance, I am sure of their completion. The most difficult of them all is the large case, but even that is in a very forward state. When all is ready I shall"—Now this, though plain language enough, is very intelligible, and even pleasing to read, but if you run all the sentences into one, in the usual manner, with *ands*, *althoughts*,

notwithstanding, but, if, your letter will be not only troublesome to make out, but it is fifty to one that you do not commit several blunders. You will be speaking of John, the case, or the commands, when you intend quite otherwise, and your friend can only guess your meaning by his knowledge of the transactions.

People who are not well acquainted with a thing, generally go about it in the way that is, really, the most difficult. Thus, a workman will cut a cork across, while others will proceed lengthways, which requires twenty times the labour and care to produce an oval exterior. Long sentences are much harder than short ones, and demand considerably more tact and ability, yet he, who can hardly express his thoughts at all on paper, is sure to take that mode which calls for an experienced practitioner. A long sentence requires not only a first-rate hand, but great attention and judgment—otherwise it will be repulsive to the reader, and, though written by a good scholar, most probably ungrammatical in some place or other.

I know many persons who can tell a story remarkably well, though they have no knowledge of grammar whatever. Yet, if those men take the pen to describe it, they give us a sad piece of work. I, who observe such things with attention, can easily solve this seeming paradox. Being naturally clear-headed, they go on regularly in oral oration, but, in writing, they impatiently crowd the circumstances together. For instance, in speaking they will say,

That two men entered Mr. Tyne's house in Lake Street on Saturday night at twelve o'clock, by means of false keys, and stole a quantity of plate and other things, out of the parlour—that a boy who lay there, happened to be awake, and hid himself under the bed, when he heard them in the passage—that it being a moonlight night, he distinctly saw them—that one was a servant discharged about two months before, by Mr. Tyne—that the other was a low man about forty, with a cut on his right cheek—that when they packed up the plunder and left the room, the boy instantly fastened the door inside, and cried murder! robbers! as loud as he could—that they then fled, carrying the booty with them.

These, and other particulars, shall be detailed with great propriety and order in a conversation, but the same people, if committing them to paper, cannot go in this regular train. They will probably write,

That two men, one of whom was a servant discharged by Mr. Tyne about two months ago, and the other, a man about forty, with a cut on his right cheek, and who should never be known but for the fortunate circumstance, of a boy who hid himself under a bed in the parlour, and who saw them packing up, and —

Thus they will run on, until they find that they have not mentioned where Mr. Tyne lived, nor the time of the robbery, nor the moonlight night, nor the false keys. Then come the *whiches*, *notwithstanding*s, and parentheses, and we have one monstrous sentence that is nothing but a mass of confusion.

If such persons would only consider, that the pen is but an instrument to put our thoughts on paper, they should discover a secret—that they could write as well as they can talk. But they have taken up the common notion, that writing is quite different from speaking, and this leads to the obscurity which has been just exemplified. Why should a pen require any such change? If they speak clearly, so they could, and ought to, write plain.

Numerous advantages arise from sentences of moderate length. Should you have to address a quarter, where accuracy and somewhat of elegance may be expected, you can easily get a learned friend to correct your draught, and put it into fitting language, if the sentences be short. But when it is arranged, or rather dis-arranged, in the long-winded style, the amendments are more troublesome than you imagine, and, after making a few trifling alterations for form sake, he says that he thinks it will do very well. Thus you are shut out from assistance that may be of the greatest consequence to your individual interest.

Know then, and I pray you not to forget it, that long-sentenced communications are so troublesome to put into proper form, that you cannot reasonably expect any person to do this, except one who is under some obligations to the writer. Know also, that it prevents many useful matters from appearing in the public prints. Of this I speak from practical experience. I now tell you, since it frequently happens that it would be necessary to write out such communications entirely, to make them fit for publication, you must not imagine, that the editor of a newspaper could find

time for such vexatious drudgery. No, nor his humbler assistant neither, and yet, when your information is unnoticed, you go about arraigning the venality of the press, when nothing but your own ignorance is the cause of rejection.

It will even sometimes occur, that an article from a correspondent, in which the editor made some corrections, and which he particularly ordered for insertion, does not appear. Upon inquiry the foreman says, "It was put in hand and gone on with a good way, until the compositor found that there was no sense in one part that was altered, and I thought it best to stop, but there was not time to send you word." The editor, probably, erased some parenthesis which happened to contain a necessary connection. Your common writers, who deal in verbosity, will sometimes, when frightened at their own lengthy sentences, *parenthesise* an important observation.

When you have to describe an occurrence or transaction, first set down all the facts, and when you think that you have omitted none, number them regularly, and try to put them into their proper places consecutively, and into short, if not pithy sentences. In doing this, avoid that prattle and garrulity which infallibly lead to long-windedness, parentheses, and insipidity. If the subject demand remarks, reserve them for the conclusion, and if they be not too strong, or too tedious, it is likely that the whole of your communication may be inserted without alteration. This will be very gratifying. The usual complaint is, that the editors of newspapers cut out the best part of such favours, but, if proper precaution be used, this cannot be done with impunity.

To relate a simple occurrence, fit to read well in print, is amongst the hardest parts of composition, especially where names are either not known, or cannot be mentioned. For this purpose, there are men *attached*, as we say, to London papers, and though they have extensive practice, and though it is, in a great measure, a sort of knack or mechanical dexterity, not many succeed well. This ought to abate your vanity, when you find your communication of a similar

nature cut up, as you will say, unmercifully. Suppose that you have to state an accident of a man being ridden over, you will find yourself so embarrassed by the horse, the rider, and the sufferer, that after you have finished, your narration would appear ludicrous enough to make us smile, though on such a serious subject. Here, short sentences will not, except with due consideration, assist—they will force you to an endless repetition of principal words, which, though admissible in philosophical disquisitions, is too heavy for common matter. I therefore strongly recommend you to practise things of this kind. Imagine any remarkable accident, and try to explain it clearly in a passable manner, without circumlocution, or without leaving it doubtful, at any time, whether you mean one thing or another. A few such trials will much improve your general style of composition.

The following may serve as a lesson. Some of those London writers of whom I have spoken, could certainly do it better, but, for my present purpose, it will answer well enough:—

To the Editor of the Politician.

SIR,—In High Street, on Tuesday evening last, at half-past eight, a gentleman violently jostled a poor inoffensive man, by which his foot was sprained, and, on remonstrance, he struck him, seized him by the collar, and handed him to a constable. Arrived at Sungate station-house, the inspector would hear nothing but from the gentleman, who, after lodging his charge for “insolence and drunkenness,” went away. Although it was freezing hard, the inspector would not, at any time, let his prisoner approach the fire, and, after remaining thirteen hours in this miserable situation, he told him, about half-past nine the next morning, “to go about his business!” The man refused, alleging that a respectable shopkeeper could prove that he was sober at the time, having been in conversation with him only ten minutes before he was charged on the watch—that he was assaulted and struck for nothing—that his foot was sprained in consequence, and he wanted to know who the gentleman was. The inspector replied by ordering his men to turn him out by force, which was immediately done. This poor fellow, who is a messenger, can get the best character from his employer, and particularly for sobriety. By the harsh treatment in the watchhouse, he has got a heavy cold, that has fallen upon his lungs—he could do nothing the next day for want of sleep, and his sprained foot will, for a long time, diminish his humble earnings, as he is only paid by the parcel.

Now, Mr. Editor, it is clear that this victim of aggravated petty tyranny has an action against the constable. But you know, that the same reason that excludes a poor man from an expensive tavern, shuts him out from the King’s Bench. I therefore request your insertion of this, for the information of the police magistrates of Sungate, who will, no doubt, compel the inspector to compensate this poor creature for his unmerited sufferings.

I think that everything here is of consequence. Even if the editor drew his pen over *half-past eight*, he would be obliged to restore it, as that plainly supports the thirteen hours' unjust and cruel imprisonment, which is very important. Taking it altogether, if satisfied of its authenticity, he could erase nothing, unless he were actuated by motives widely different from independence. I shall now explain how it may serve as an exercise.

Read over attentively the first paragraph which contains the facts. They will soon be impressed on your memory, so as that you could relate them correctly, without omitting any. I do not mean that you should get the article by heart—on the contrary, that would defeat our object. But, when you can correctly detail all the circumstances, write down a full statement of the whole, and do this several times, until you think that it is tolerably free from the usual faults of composition. You need not give yourself any trouble about the order that I have observed, for that might admit of improvement—it will be sufficient if you give all the facts, without putting any of them absurdly out of place.

You may also take a useful hint from the concluding paragraph. However great my indignation, I have kept the editor's pen behind his ear, by not launching out into high-flown exclamations against the gentleman, the inspector, despotism, oppression, and scandalous violation of the laws. But I have done more towards the accomplishment of my object. I have, though tritely, shown the folly of sending the poor man to the higher courts for legal redress, and I have, pointedly enough, apprised those magistrates, who ought to be accountable for the conduct of a police-officer, that they are bound to see, that the sufferer by his aggressions should be compensated.

If you did not, on commencing this chapter, completely understand what a sentence means, I should think that you ought to know it by this time. The different examples furnished show its signification, and my intention was, that you should find it out through them. I shall now, for your greater satisfaction, give a particular explanation.

Without going into tiresome definitions, a sentence in-

cludes all the words that you find, until you come to a period or full point. In the preceding paragraph, there are three sentences, from *If* down to *explanation*. The parts or divisions that compose them, are called Members, and where there is more than one of these, the whole is termed a *compound* sentence. If there be only one, it is a *simple* sentence, and observe that all, whether compound or simple, must begin with a capital letter.

A plainer definition of a member is, every part where we find a point, but this cannot be taken in a literal sense. Thus, in the following there are six points, that is, five commas and one period, yet there are truly but five members, because *although* is only a transposition, and really belongs to what follows after *colleagues* :—

He would not accept any remuneration for his services, although, in the opinion of his colleagues, he was well entitled to five hundred, or even a thousand pounds, with the house and land also.

The following will illustrate what is meant by simple sentences. Each, it will be seen, has only one member :—

None could exceed him in candour. His benevolence was equally remarkable. He had no affectation whatever. All his actions were distinguished by a noble carelessness of public opinion. This did not arise from pride. He was a rare example of *masculine* humility.

Some writers are very fond of simple sentences, but their too constant use will, imperceptibly, conduct to a feeble style. Their occasional introduction is enlivening, and, if well arranged, they are peculiarly agreeable at the commencement of an essay. But their management requires great dexterity, and I caution you against making too free with them. They are, too frequently, only compound sentences unnaturally broken, and, even when perfectly constructed, a continuance soon palls upon the ear. You will now see that the preceding example is, in fact, but two compound sentences :—

None could exceed him in candour—his benevolence was equally remarkable nor had he any affectation whatever. All his actions were distinguished by a noble carelessness of opinion, but this did not arise from pride, for he was a rare example of *masculine* humility.

The most extravagant use of simple sentences that I have seen, is in Lord Byron's "Death of Calma and Orla." There, we may meet four or five successively, with only from three

to four words in each of them! Remember, however, that Byron was a poet of the first order, and that those were poetical thoughts expressed in elevated prose. Never attempt the flights of mighty geniuses. If you do, you will only fall like Icarus, and hurt the credit that sensible men were beginning to award your exertions. Even Lord Byron himself is, by some good judges, thought to have, in this instance, unnaturally *out-Ossianed* his great master of brief expression.

It is commonly recommended in giving a general rule, to make our sentences of a moderate length, with an occasional sprinkling of short ones. This is good advice. I cannot too strongly impress upon you, that it requires superior ability—the powers of a Robertson, to compose a long sentence well. For, after all, the test lies with the reader, and, as it is for him that you are working, so you must look only to him. If your composition do not run somewhat smoothly—if the sentences be drawled out, and if the different members do not readily connect, he will have some trouble in comprehending the sense, and no man likes labour of this kind.

However, it will sometimes occur that very extended sentences are allowable, and even proper or necessary. But they are generally in the nature of detail. We may say, “He had many strange customs and propensities. He always wore a cocked-hat—he went to bed at nine and rose at four—he never went out on a Monday—winter and summer he wore white trowsers—he had a great horror of black cats—he wore a wig over his hair, which was always abundant—he would never have any but negro servants.” Such a sentence as this, might be continued for a page or two, without inconvenience to the reader, because he is not called upon to collect any scattered links.

In like manner, you may continue any number of recapitulatory abstracts, which are, plainly, of a conditional nature, as thus :—

If I am to believe all his assertions about bare possibility—if I am to argue on assumptions, and not on facts—if my positive assertions are to be answered by conjectures—if Pascal is produced when I require Kant—if exceptions are constantly tendered, when I, explicitly, reject them—I may well be excused for declining any further controversy.

We may go on here as long as we like, because, if the reader become impatient he can, in an instant, throw his eye on the conclusion, and see at what the author aims.

In writing of any kind, pay particular attention to what I have already said, to begin every sentence with a capital letter. For want of this some compositions, otherwise terse enough, are extremely difficult to read, and, since this is true, how must it be with those of the long-winded description? But I have more to say in another place, on the use of capitals, and shall now give some directions which you may find useful.

First. Avoid finishing sentences with such words as *for*, *such*, *with*, *of*, *by*, *on*, *to*, and some others of a similar nature, that I cannot now recollect. They can generally be otherwise turned. Instead of, "*and other things that he was unacquainted with*," say, *with which* he was unacquainted. "*Less than he could purchase the horse for*," say, *for less* than he could purchase the horse. "*He wished to pay him in goods, but he was offended at his offering him such*." This is nonsense. Why not say, *such payment?* Expressions as, "I knew it was a thing that he could not avail himself of," "stand by," "count on," "arrive to," should be changed to, a thing *of* which he could not avail himself, *by* which he could not stand, *on* which he could not count, *to* which he could not arrive. There are other trifling words also, such as *it*, *this*, *not*, *you*, *has*, which are not recommended as eligible for the termination of a sentence, but it is not always easy to observe such strictness, and therefore our best guide is, to finish, as often as possible, with a word of some weight.

Secondly. Avoid, as often as you can, to begin two successive sentences with the same word. It is always a sign of being a common writer—it is displeasing to the ear, and it even offends the eye of the reader. The words that are most usually repeated in this way are *but*, *if*, *though*, *however*, *it*, *they*, *he*, *she*, *I*, *you*, *notwithstanding*, *for*, *then*, *as*, *having*, *and*, *the*, *this*—besides proper names. You can always steer clear of this defect, by looking at the preceding sentence when going to begin another. I may here remark that some persons insist that *And* should never commence a sentence in

modern languages, but, without opposing their opinion, I may observe, that our most eminent authors use it, and that must pass for sufficient sanction.

But you must particularly avoid beginning a sentence with the terminating word of that immediately preceding. This is a very great imperfection. Nothing can be worse than finishings and commencements like these :—

but he said that he knew it. It did not, however, appear that
and he only gave us words. Words will not do for this
he said that he was an honest man than I. I told him that such an
assertion
and so he gave it to John. John then came to me
but this was like all the rest. Rest assured notwithstanding

Thirdly. Avoid the frequent &c. as your great enemy to improvement in writing. If you depend on this crutch, your composition will be always lame. This is the most prominent mark of a poor, vulgar, and ignorant writer. Such wretched scrawlers cannot go through twenty lines without it, and they think that it is a great help to correctness, and even to elegance. But in this they are woefully mistaken. Let them look into the works of Robertson, Johnson, Melmoth, Junius, Burke, and see whether they used this miserable substitute for plain expression. It can only be tolerated to save tiresome repetition, or unnecessary recapitulation.

The frequent use of the &c. arises from the same ridiculous anxiety for precision, that produces the parenthesis, and the folly of which, I should hope, that I have successfully exposed. In a description, by one of those wordy writers, of a visit to a country seat, this is one passage in his relation :—

He entertained us very hospitably with cakes, wines, fruits, &c., and afterwards showed us his library, museum, garden, spacious stables, &c. On going away, he himself, together with his lady, their beautiful daughter, &c. &c., accompanied us to the gate, preceded by two servants in dress liveries, with silver-headed canes, &c.

As he wished this to appear in print, he showed it to me with looks of great self-approval, and I altered it thus :—

He entertained us very hospitably with cakes, wine, fruit—and afterwards showed us, amongst other things well deserving inspection, his library, museum, garden, and spacious stables. On going away, he himself, with his lady, his beautiful eldest daughter, and others of his family and friends, accompanied us to the gate, preceded by two servants in dress liveries, with silver-headed canes, and otherwise completely appointed.

I would not have made it so long, but that I knew my man. He said that the alteration might do, except about the entertainment, because there were ham, cold turkey, jellies, and other things that he did not like to particularise, but which, certainly, in common honesty, required an &c.—and besides there were two kinds of wine, and three of fruit, and as I put them both in the singular, the *s* must be replaced. I need not say, that I got rid of him as expeditiously as civility would permit.

The &c. is now objected to except in advertisements, or in a detail of numerous articles, or where we refer to some long extract already quoted, and upon the different passages of which we have to make remarks. In this case, it would be tiresome to give the whole sentence again, and we may say, *But where he asserts that "he went to France for the express purpose, &c.," I think that the date alone will show his error.* You will see, however, that this &c. might be replaced by the long dash, when you come to the remarks on that subject.

The following is a correction of the miserable composition in our third paragraph. I have placed it here, without any previous reference, in the hope that you would, first, exercise yourself on the improvement, as I directed:—

Yours of the 25th ult. did not come to hand till the 6th instant. The delay was owing to the bearer, Mr. Jackson, being detained by the late heavy snow. Business has been, thank God, very good latterly, and I now take the first opportunity that is presented, to answer your letter. I fear, however, that my contracted leisure will not permit me to do that, as particularly as I could wish. But, although I cannot now notice all your different commands respectively, I think that you may expect them to be entirely completed in about three weeks. You will then have a tolerable provision for the remainder of the winter, which, as you justly observe, promises to be unusually severe.

The following is an instance of a long and well-constructed sentence. It is taken from Robertson's "State of Europe," prefixed to his "History of Charles the Fifth," and, though it contains eighty-four words, there is such a felicitous arrangement that we can wish no alteration. The connecting chain, though of great strength, is of such an elastic nature that the members, without a vestige of liberty, seem to have perfect freedom. Yet a succession of such beautiful flights would soon tire us. Their length would call for repose, and you

therefore see, that were you even adequate to the power of long sentences, you must frequently come to truce with the wearied reader :—

Notwithstanding the singular revolution which the invasion of the Moors occasioned in Spain, and the peculiarity of its fate, in being so long subject to the Mahometan yoke, the customs introduced by the Goths and Vandals had taken such deep root, and were so thoroughly incorporated with the frame of its government, that in every province which the Christians recovered from the Moors, we find the condition of individuals, as well as the political constitution, nearly the same as in other nations of Europe.

One great test of the perfection of a sentence, I think, is, when we cannot, with propriety, introduce any stop except the comma. In the foregoing example, though extended to such a length, I would defy the most fastidious punctuator to put in a semicolon, and as for the colon, parenthesis, or dash, they are out of the question. This shows that there is, all through, an original and positive strength. When a semicolon can be fitly brought in, the bond of connection is weakened, proportionably to the separation. The entireness of the sentence is certainly, in some degree, broken, and this, as in architecture, must be a defect. The semicolon exposes the imperfections of composition, and we may oppose, at least, its *negative* claims.

Mr. Lindley Murray has appended to his Grammar, an excellent set of rules for the construction of sentences. Yet, in this self-same book, I find the following, which is a very objectionable style of composition, and contrary to the laws that he has, himself, collected. I know that it is not fair to take, for any particular purpose, one sentence out of a large work, because the most vigilant cannot be always on guard, but, really, this appears to be manufactured with no ordinary care. The parade of colons seems to imply, that the author thought it a good specimen of a long sentence. We may judge how far this is true, by comparing it with that from Robertson. One can see, from the semicolon, that Mr. Murray began to find it “an unwieldy apparatus,” yet, hanging the members on strong punctuation pegs, he believed that he had rendered the whole very manageable :—

The observations which we have made under this head, and on the subject of moods in another place, will not apply to the declension and cases of nouns, so as to require us to adopt names and divisions similar to those of the Greek

and Latin languages: for we should then have more cases than there are prepositions in connection with the article and noun: and after all, it would be a useless, as well as an unwieldy apparatus; since every English preposition points to and governs but one case, namely, the objective; which is also true with respect to our governing verbs and participles.

Though I am unwilling to swell this treatise with quotations that may not be directly of use to my readers, I think, after what I have said of Murray, that I am justified in giving the following, from that gentleman's observations on the construction of sentences:—

Long, involved, and intricate sentences are great blemishes in composition. In writers of considerable correctness, we find a period sometimes running out so far, and comprehending so many particulars, as to be more properly a discourse than a sentence. An author, speaking of the progress of our language after the time of Cromwell, runs on in this manner: "To this succeeded that licentiousness which entered with the Restoration, and, from infecting our religion and morals, fell to corrupt our language; which last was not likely to be much improved by those who at that time made up the court of King Charles the Second; either such as had followed him in his banishment, or who had been altogether conversant in the dialect of these times, or young men who had been educated in the same country: so that the court, which used to be the standard of correctness and propriety of speech, was then, and I think has ever since continued, the worst school in England for that accomplishment; and so will remain, till better care be taken in the education of our nobility, that they may set out into the world with some foundations of literature, in order to qualify them for patterns of politeness."

The author in place of a sentence, has here given a loose dissertation upon several subjects. How many different facts, reasonings, and observations, are here presented to the mind at once! and yet so linked together by the author, that they all make parts of a sentence, which admits of no greater division in pointing, than a colon between any of its members.

"A loose dissertation upon several subjects!" Why the wordy author, who, strange to say, is Swift, confines himself to his subject, the vitiation of English, full as closely as Mr. Murray does in his three-coloned sentence. You may derive some benefit from this consideration. All must admit that Mr. Murray generally evinces superior judgment and ability in the construction of sentences. You have seen a proof in his judicious remarks on the previous quotation, and yet when he himself, though apparently with great care, attempts a long sentence, he exhibits those faults which he can so ably expose.

Since I have occupied so much space with this long quotation, it occurs to me that I may make it of some use. Mr. Murray should have pointed out its defects more particularly, and shown the pupil how he may correct them, and,

as he has not done this, I shall take the liberty to attempt its improvement :—

To this succeeded that licentiousness which entered with the Restoration, and, from infecting our religion and morals, fell to corrupt our language. This last was not likely to be much improved by those who, at that time, made up the court of King Charles the Second—either such as had followed him in his banishment, or who had been altogether conversant in the dialect of those times, or young men who had been educated in the same country. The court, thus, which used to be the standard of correctness and propriety of speech, was then, has I think ever since continued, and will remain, the worst school in England for that accomplishment, till better care be taken in the education of our nobility, that they may set out into the world with some foundations of literature, in order to qualify them for patterns of politeness.

Compare this diligently with the original, and note the important change that has been effected by such trifling alterations as could hardly displease Swift himself. It now reads smooth, easy and pleasing, and is no longer “a loose dissertation upon several subjects.” Let such exercises as this be your constant study. Whenever you meet a long-winded sentence, take a pen and try to improve it on this plan, and you will be surprised at the rapid melioration in your own style. Again, and again I say, that nothing can help you so certainly to respectable composition, and you can find abundant examples for correction.

Having now conducted you safely through the dangers of circumlocution and tediousness, I may venture to tell you what I was unwilling even to hint at before—that all very protracted sentences, where there is no detail, are not necessarily long-winded. They cannot be so, if you read on with ease and pleasure, and find no demand upon your memory or attention, for keeping distant or questionable connections in view. Where the subject is suited to your comprehension, if you understand readily as you proceed, there cannot be long-windedness, though your author may not choose to make divisions or periods. Of this, the most illustrious example that I have found is Buffon, who has, sometimes, longer sentences than I have encountered in our ancient English writers, who seem to be fascinated with a prolixity of development, and for which the French were never so remarkable. In his “Rules for the Art of Writing,” I find one

sentence of 147 words, and another of no fewer than 167! This last, I must own, is somewhat, though not altogether, in the nature of detail, but the other is not of that character, and yet it reads with a smoothness so delightful, and so full of charms, that one cannot think it could be improved by smaller divisions. I never saw anything among our own authors to equal it, because when we approach such length, the sense is disagreeably forced upon us by means of colons, which plainly indicate a strange and unnatural connection, as if the writer felt that his reader was beginning to think disjunction necessary. Buffon's sentence of 167 words is, through all its parts, strongly and unexceptionably sustained by simple commas, and two semicolons only—a similar instance might, in vain, be sought through all the books in the English language.

Our lengthy sentences, when not long-winded, are generally two or more brought, without any perceivable necessity or advantage, into one period, and we may, therefore, safely recommend the learner to exercise himself, in separating them into their more natural and pleasing divisions. Many instances of this kind may be found in Locke. He was too clearheaded to be drawling, but colons being much used in his day, he often introduces them where the sense is complete, and when the following matter should go to a new sentence.

I was about to conclude, when I saw Buffon's description of the dog, and there I find a sentence of 216 words! Without the aid of a larger type than we see frequently used, it would fill an octavo page, yet there is but one colon, and that comes in so adroitly, as not to entirely justify the propriety of a new sentence. The whole is so finely managed—the qualities of the dog are described in such a skilfully consecutive order, that any break would seem to be a fault, and, instead of being tired or offended by such a tyrannical draught on his undivided attention, the reader only regrets that he comes so soon to the conclusion.

From these considerations, you see the necessity of some discrimination in the reduction of long sentences, which is, certainly, an excellent exercise for composition. Examine

first whether they be long-winded or not, and if they are, make the divisions without any concern about the author's phraseology or language. With that you have nothing to do—your business is only to make the necessary separations, with the least possible transposition or omission of the original words, or introduction of new ones. Even where there are faults in expression, unless they cause nonsensical disjunction, you must not correct them, for that belongs to another kind of exercise. You may point them out in subsequent remarks, to show that they did not escape your notice, but you must, at present, confine yourself steadily to your object—to make the whole read smooth by easy and natural subdivisions, so as to rectify your author's crude notions of long-winded connections.

Encouragement is like hope—the stay and prop of exertion, and since so much has been said of Buffon, it may be satisfactory to mention, that he composed with great pain and difficulty. It appears that he frequently corrected everything that he wrote, before going to press—sometimes as often as twenty times over! Were it not for this fact being well known, we should have our commentators on style expatiating, in terms of admiration, on the *natural* ease and flow of his thoughts, but you can turn it to a more useful account—to support and cheer you in your humble efforts, as you see that nearly the most remarkable success in composition with which we are acquainted was not, altogether, effected by superior genius.

CHAPTER III.

SECOND CAUSE OF FAILURE IN COMPOSITION.

THE fear of repeating a word destroys all chance of good writing. It is much better to use the same words a hundred times, than to leave the sense weak or doubtful. While I admit that a pleasing variety shows a well-informed mind, and is very attractive, it must be recollected, that plainness is

never disagreeable, and that sense should never be sacrificed at the shrine of ornament.

Those to whom my pages are addressed have all got hold of this false notion, and its effects are accordingly seen when they attempt to write. I have known one of those persons, when on the subject of a house, sooner than repeat the word too often, to call it a residence, a dwelling, a habitation, and at last a *mansion*, although it contained only four rooms! Thus they make themselves ridiculous, they mar their own intentions of clearness, and they are sure to be either pitied or despised by men of penetration and judgment.

But, although this is bad enough, it is not in substantives only, or in the more important words, that this dread of repetition is evinced. It extends to conjunctions, pronouns and other words, that are necessary for connection, perspicuity and correctness. The poor writer has a great horror of *that*, *he*, *I*, *you*, *it*, *she*, *they*, and he scrupulously avoids them as destructive to beauty or elegance. He says, "I am happy to hear you are well, and am rejoiced you will be soon coming to London." It would shock him to write, I am happy to hear *that* you are well, and *I* am rejoiced *that* you will be soon coming to London. He begins his advertisement, "John James informs his friends he has laid in his winter assortment, and hopes he will experience"——. Mr. James would as soon say, that his goods were bad, as to inform his friends *that* he has laid in his winter assortment, and *he* hopes *that* he will experience ——. Yet the introduction of those words in italics, would show the writer to be above the common class, and I cannot too particularly insist upon great attention to this point.

One of my acquaintances, who feared *that* as if it were a ghost, had occasion to address a great man. He showed me the draught, observing that he thought the commencement would do very well, but that other parts required amendment. It began, "I hope, you will pardon the liberty, I take in stating, I cannot possibly accede to the terms, Mr. Vendall your agent has proposed for renewing my lease, expired last month." "There," said he, before I had time to make a remark, "is a sentence without a single *that* or *which*, and no

necessity for any stop, but I am afraid you will not find the rest so good." I much damped his joy—indeed he appeared disgusted, when I told him, that there were five *thats* strictly required where I marked a caret, but that I would dispense altogether with the first, and allow *which* after *terms*. "There would still be three *thats*," said he. Yes, said I, and you must also put at least two commas—one after *stating*, and another after *proposed*. He smiled at my platitude, and punningly remarked, *that* the terms *which* I demanded were as unreasonable as Mr. Vendall's.

Divest yourself, I say again, of such most erroneous notions. Though you may never hope to arrive at anything beyond mediocrity, try at least to write with firmness, for that is expected. I shall now give a sample of that manner, for it can hardly be called a style, in which you find advertisements drawn up by those who think that they know the beauties of composition:—

Henry Jack, merchant-tailor, having again resumed business, and taken the house, No. 6, Daw-street, begs to state he is extensively supplied with the most beautiful sky-blue Cerulino for waistcoating, now so fashionable, and is determined no other shall undersell him in this article, or any in his line. With respect to coat-making, he hopes the fame he has acquired in such important branch, will secure him the distinguished patronage he has been so remarkable for, since his first commencing.

Any person of information, on reading this advertisement, would immediately see, that it was written by a man of the humblest literary capacity. There are even some who might connect it, prejudicially, with his ability concerning work, and it is of consequence to prevent such conclusions from being drawn. In truth, the advertisement is a fine specimen of what we call fustian, or a kind of bombastic style—an attempt at neatness and strength, while it is only a pitiable exhibition of clumsiness and debility. Bad as it is, it might, however, be worse. The meaning is perfectly intelligible all through, and, in the following corrected form, it will be seen that I have done little more than to put in the words that are obviously necessary:—

Henry Jack, merchant-tailor, having again resumed business, and having taken the house, No. 6, Daw-street, begs to state, that he is extensively supplied with most beautiful sky-blue Cerulino for waistcoating, which is now so fashionable, and he is determined that no other house shall undersell him in

this, or any other article in his line. With respect to coat making, he hopes, that the fame which he has acquired in that important branch, will secure to him the distinguished patronage that he has been so remarkable for, since his commencement in business.

Though Mr. Jack might, possibly, admit the propriety of the small words that are introduced, he would no doubt be shocked at the repetition of *house*, and *business*, and particularly at the second *other* coming so dangerously near the first. This last might certainly be omitted, and I only inserted it because the construction cannot be called mean, and because I wish to show that we should not hesitate about such frivolities when we may give additional weight to a sentence.

But we must not run into extremes. There is no occasion, neither is it proper, to say, "I would have answered your first letter, but your second letter renders it unnecessary to answer your first letter." All the purposes of clearness are secured by this turn, "I would have answered your first letter, but your second renders that unnecessary." Give yourself no trouble about the possibility of the word *that* being otherwise applied than as you mean, for every one will readily comprehend your true intention. *It* might be substituted for *that*, though the change is not worth consideration.

Mr. Lindley Murray, in his remarks on the construction of sentences, says:—

A long succession of either long or short sentences should be avoided; for the ear tires of either of them when too long continued.

Here are three *longs* in a very short sentence. This, you will, no doubt, consider to be a very poor and ungraceful production from such an eminent grammarian, especially when on the subject of composition. Yet Mr. Murray was, at the very time, treating of "perspicuity and accuracy," and we cannot suppose that he wrote carelessly, as he was not addressing schoolboys, but *advanced* students. No—on the contrary, I am sure that he well knew what he penned. Such a master of English could easily have avoided the two last repetitions of *long*, but he disdained to give, in himself, an example of that puerile fear against which I have been warning you. Take the hint from such authority, and seek

not for different words, where strength and clearness are manifestly in danger.

However, there is a medium to be preserved. Improved language is, indeed, so full of elisions, that too much particularity will only produce unnecessary tautology. Grammar, or rather the stiff grammarian, requires what I consider a needless repetition in some instances, as, Give one shilling to John, two *shillings* to Peter, and three to James. Now, I contend that *shillings* may be omitted without any violation of correctness. For, after having said *one*, the *two* means *two such*, or *similar ones*—an expression so convenient, that grammarians are forced to allow its admissibility. Mr. Walker himself says, that “One has sometimes a plural, when it stands for persons indefinitely, as the great Ones of this world.” This is but a poor evasion of fact. Every reader knows, that the first writers apply *ones* to *things* as well as to “persons indefinite,” and why conceal what has actually become grammatical? I could mention many other remarkable elliptical phrases, and some that might curiously defend very bad grammar, but this would be a dangerous topic for those to whom my book is addressed. Liberty in language requires great judgment, and, perhaps, I have even said a little more than may be prudent. I shall, however, make some other observations on the ellipsis in a separate chapter.

CHAPTER IV.

THIRD CAUSE OF FAILURE IN COMPOSITION.

IN the commencement of my work I described this as arising from “your not duly considering the previous part of a sentence, which often produces ludicrous errors, such as making a horse or a house appear to do the business of a man.” I thought that I should have a great deal to say on this subject, but I find that I have anticipated myself in the second chapter. For, if you avoid long sentences, you will generally steer clear of the absurdities that are now to be considered.

I therefore entreat that you will try to write with brevity. Force yourself, by repeated trials, to abandon that verbosity which is so disgusting to men of sense, and so dangerous to clearness of expression. Think first of what you have to relate, and then proceed as directed for the parenthetical example. I can give you no better advice for curing that disgraceful obscurity, and that intolerable prolixity, which militates against being clearly understood, or sufferable to read.

The following is an example of the blunders, confusion, and general incorrectness, that this wordy propensity brings forth. I am sorry to say that it is not overstrained, for I know too many who would write a similar occurrence in the same manner:—

On Thursday two fellows driving a drove of cows to Smithfield (though they appeared to be sober, which makes their conduct the more criminal) were forced against a house in Ham's Lane, and broke the shop-window (doing other damage besides), by which one was killed from falling on some iron spikes that were in front! They did not however seem to be any way concerned about this shameful proceeding, but on the contrary abused the owners, who however had them brought to the police office, and detained the cows (having first sent the dead one, in a cart, to Mr. Saleses yard adjoining), and they were soon fully and most deservedly committed to Newgate for this scandalous act. This occurred at ten o'clock in the forenoon on the day above mentioned, and the names of the persons whose windows were broken, are John Kraubman and Co., highly respectable German sausage-makers, one of whom had like to be killed, when he went out, such was the maddened state of those poor animals! It is pleasing however to think that they will suffer (as there can be no doubt but they must), the just punishment of their outrageous and unwarrantable offence.

In this occurrence there are very few incidents, and yet what a mass of confusion and incoherency it presents! It is scarcely necessary to examine its faults. We are first told, that, although the cows were sober, two fellows were forced against a house, by which one was killed—that they then abused the owners of the cows—that those cows were then sent to Newgate—that the Kraubmans are poor animals—and, finally, that it is pleasing to think, that the cows or the Kraubmans, for it is doubtful which, will be punished. Why, if one who could write thus had to tell a story wherein a dozen persons figured, together with dogs, cows, horses, and a carriage, it would be altogether unintelligible.

A plain arrangement which will show the sense is, how-

ever, not very difficult, if you keep the prominent facts in view, as will appear by the following summary :—

At ten o'clock on Thursday morning two fellows who were driving cows to Smithfield, forced them against the house of Messrs. Kraubman and Co., sausage-makers in Ham's Lane, by which the window was demolished, and one of the poor animals killed by the iron spikes in front. The ruffians, though apparently sober, instead of anything like contrition, abused Messrs. Kraubman, but they secured and sent them to the police-office. Their committal was soon made out, and they are now in Newgate. Messrs. Kraubman, one of whom, in the first confusion, narrowly escaped death, have, for the present, detained the cows—the one that was killed being given in charge to Mr. Sale, who lives near the spot.

The following advertisement deserves your consideration. There you see the blunders that arise in sentences, from not properly placing their various members. I could give much more faulty examples, but this may suffice :—

IRON-MONGERY.—Thomas and John Hasp, 26, Bolt Street, inform their numerous customers, they have taken the large concern No. 10, Screw Street, lately occupied by Hammer and Co. for the better extending their business, and hope they shall now be able to satisfy their utmost expectations, as they will devote the former exclusively to the sale of all articles in their usual line, and the latter, entirely to nail-making, for the accommodation of country dealers, which they have been so remarkable for these fifteen years past.

Here you see that the advertisers say, that Hammer and Co. occupied the large concern for the better extending their business. They also hope, that they shall be able to satisfy Hammer and Co.'s utmost expectations, and they conclude by informing us, that they have been fifteen years remarkable for accommodating country dealers, though they mean to say, for nail-making. The following, without interfering with the particular phraseology of the advertisers, gives the sense of what they intend :—

IRON-MONGERY.—Thomas and John Hasp, No. 26 Bolt Street, inform their numerous customers, that, for the better extending their business, they have taken the large concern, No. 10, Screw Street, lately occupied by Hammer and Co. They hope that they shall now be able to satisfy the utmost expectations, as they will devote the house in Bolt Street, exclusively to the sale of all articles in their usual line, and the new Establishment, entirely to nail-making. Having been, fifteen years, remarkable in that branch, they can now give greater accommodation to country dealers.

I dismiss this part of my subject rather abruptly, because others have treated it copiously, and there is no necessity for me to enlarge upon what has been already well performed. Numerous examples of misplacing words and members, are

collected by Mr. Murray and latter grammarians, to whom you may refer. In offering an instance or two of a more familiar nature, I have done as much as seems to be necessary.

London Newspapers.

In concluding this portion of my work, it will appear scarcely necessary to apologise for adverting to the London Newspapers. To that part of the public press we are much indebted for a rapid improvement in composition, and it were injustice to let pass the opportunity of acknowledgment. Since the commencement of the present century our style has been more chastened, I may indeed say, *clarified*, through newspaper influence, than by books for a hundred previous years.

The competition for excellence in every respect, induced the proprietors to spare no expense in the literary departments, and, as the editors felt that they themselves became the more important persons in public estimation, their exertions were of the most ardent and indefatigable nature. They found that even some of the humblest in society were beginning to be judges of style—that journeymen shoemakers presumed to talk of good and ill-written articles. A newspaper was soon noticed for dull, prosing commentaries, and hence, the necessity of neat and well-turned periods was obvious, for exciting interest and ensuring perusal.

This is not attributing more than is due to the newspapers. No author, however clever or practised, ever wrote a book without wishing some alteration after publication—indeed, the very extent alone of almost any work nearly precludes the possibility of satisfactory completion. But the newspaper editor has peculiar advantages. His articles are short, and, being in daily practice of seeing them in print, he learns to avoid all those things that prevent them from “reading smooth.” Thus, although they may not always display a vigorous understanding, or a Johnsonian “grasp of mind,” they are, generally, in point of composition, very respectable specimens. The reporters have caught the spirit, and, down

to the collectors of fires and ordinary occurrences, a perspicuity of narration has become indispensable—none can now expect employment, whose writing requires constant editorial correction.

In confining these remarks to the metropolitan press, I mean no disparagement of our papers elsewhere. But, if many of them now equal those of London, we should not forget that it first set the example, and excited that spirit of emulation, the *literary* effect of which is, more or less, felt in every part of the empire.

I might also observe, though it more appropriately belongs to another part of this work, that punctuation is much indebted to the newspapers. In books, the authors have a control that is, too often, more prejudicial than serviceable, but, in the public journal, there are none of those checks to improvement—the *favours* of correspondents are altered as propriety requires. Accordingly we find that, since the London newspapers aimed at high respectability, a greater reformation of pointing was effected, in ten years, than we could otherwise expect for a century to come. They first threw out the constant semicolon, introduced the dash judiciously, and, by the frequent comma, they may be said to have invented that most valuable of all improvements in punctuation, high pointing.

CHAPTER V.

PARAGRAPHS.

EVERY thing that is included in separate divisions constitutes a paragraph. In the commencement of the first chapter, from *I* to *title* is one, from *My* to *expense* is another, and so on. What particularly marks a paragraph is, the first line being *indented* or begun more to the right hand, by which it is somewhat shorter than the usual measure. But a separated quotation or example is only a part of the paragraph by which it is explained or introduced.

Paragraphs should never be extended to a great length. If very long, they will run the risk of not being read attentively. They make us impatient to go to the next, and, if there be a succession of such protracted stages, we get tired and begin to think of repose. The eye must be pleased as well as the mind. The end of every paragraph is a certain relief to thought or attention—the commencement of the next is a new prospect for the sight, and if each be not somewhat gratified, desire will abate, and we shall feel inclined to halt on our journey. But it is not easy to fix a standard for the size of paragraphs, for they are affected by that of the book. What may appear long in this work would, in a quarto, seem even displeasingly short. I may recommend, however, that they be diversified into long and short, for a monotonous sameness is displeasing here, as well as in other matters. Were I to give anything like a general direction as to length, I would say, that they should seldom contain less than sixty words, and not exceed five hundred. In newspapers, they often run to extraordinary length, but where columns are above a foot and a half long, and space an object, we cannot expect attention to such matters.

Some authors are fond of the shortest paragraphs possible, and will continue them, all through, with only from thirty to fifty words in each. I caution you to beware of this. Such writing assumes too aphoristical an appearance—it is like a list of maxims or apophthegms. Finding a difficulty of connection, we read carelessly, and, seeing no necessity for this starched formality, we are offended by such an uncalled-for dictatorial pomposity. There is an appearance of too much self-confidence and opinion, as if the author thought that every line should be got by heart, but he only forces us to recollect, that every writer is not a Bacon. To arrogate, upon ordinary occasions, a didactic or preceptive tone, is nothing less than ridiculous. Montesquieu, in his *Esprit des Loix*, has a chapter containing only four lines, but such a sententious and profound writer could, with propriety, do what would be ridiculous in others.

CHAPTER VI.

STYLE.

THAN style, few subjects have been more extensively discussed, and yet hardly any with so little effect. Men of learning and judgment, from Cicero and Quintilian down to the present day, have written largely upon it, but those who looked for real instruction never reaped much from their labours. For this remarkable failure of purpose there must be a cause, and its examination will be the chief object of this chapter.

Dr. Irvine's treatise ought to be, and is, I believe, the best, because he expressly desires that it should be considered as a compilation from the works of others. His words are, "I desire to be regarded in no other light than that of a mere compiler." He has laboriously brought together, and very ingeniously, and I will add, judiciously, connected, every thing worth recording in his numerous predecessors, whether ancient or modern, and I think that I may, therefore, very fairly confine myself to his book. Nor can it be any offence to that gentleman if, to save trouble, I speak of him as the author, for, by selecting the opinions of others that are conformable to his own, he places himself, at least as to responsibility, in the situation of an original writer. Now I find, in this book, twelve kinds of style copiously treated, under the following heads, to which I have affixed the authors quoted as examples :—

CONCISE. Aristotle, Tacitus, Montesquieu, Locke, Clarke, Reid.

DIFFUSE. Plato, Cicero, Temple, Addison, Burke.

NERVOUS. Bacon, Raleigh, Hooker, Milton, Gataker, Johnson, Ferguson, Stuart, Robertson, Gibbon.

FEEBLE. Spence.

VEHEMENT. Bolingbroke, Burke.

PLAIN. Swift.

DRY or HARSH. Aristotle

NEAT. Middleton, Berkeley, Blackstone, Smith.

GRACEFUL. Cowley, Dryden, Addison, Pope, Atterbury, Melmoth, Hume, Beattie.

FLORID. Hervey, Dyer, Johnson's "Rasselas," Hawkesworth's "Almorán and Hamet," Langhorne's "Solyman and Almena," and the tales in the *Spectator*, *Rambler*, and *Adventurer*.

SIMPLE. Homer, Hesiod, Anacreon, Theocritus, Herodotus, Xenophon, Terence, Lucretius, Cæsar, Jortin, Tilletson, Temple, Addison, Goldsmith, Fox.

AFFECTED. Shaftesbury, Blackwell.

There are also others occasionally noticed, as the loose, precise, pompous, musical, polite, familiar, poetical, easy, epistolary, oratorical, flowing, *périodique*, and *coupé*—say, in round numbers, about two dozen, though I may remark, that Doctor Johnson would seem to recognise but four, if we may judge from a passage in his *Life of Dryden*, "All polished languages have different styles; the concise, the diffuse, the lofty, and the humble."

Give those examples, without names or designations, to another equally competent judge as Dr. Irvine, and see if he will classify the styles similarly. We may be pretty sure that he would not, because there is nothing like a fixed guide to decision. It is, like beauty, a matter of taste or opinion, and cannot, therefore, be of any great utility as to instruction. But, supposing that it were fixable, and that each style could be demonstrated with unerring precision, what could it do for him who is aiming at such modes of writing? Nothing. He asks for plain rules, and is literally laughed at for his folly. "Then," says he, "I must imitate those great models." "No," says his *instructor*, "for imitation has never yet formed a good writer, poet, musician, or actor." Why, Sancho Panza was better off under the whimsical Doctor Snatchaway, for he got something to chew at last, after much temporary privation.

It is admitted, however, that good instructions may do much, and this is true to a certain extent. But they must be something of a mechanical nature—something, as it were, tangible, and of which we can lay hold. Mere specimens

and commentaries will avail but little to the learner, whether he be young, or of mature years. He reads—admires the profundity of the observations, but nothing remains on his mind. To him, the list of grammatical errors or of weak points, in the construction of sentences, that accompany books like that of Dr. Irvine, is of more service than all the essays upon style that ever were written. The catalogue of vulgarisms may also be useful, but it is worth remarking, that many of the examples are from Addison, Pope, Smith, Aikin, Johnson, Melmoth, Kame, Blair, and Lowth, whose styles are generally christened Graceful, Neat, Nervous, and other endearing appellations.

The cause of this striking uselessness of all those treatises on style, cannot, as we have seen, arise from men of erudition and judgment leaving the subject in feeble hands. It has been discussed by those who, in their own writings, have given imposing proofs of being qualified for the undertaking. Amongst the moderns, who ever excelled—I might almost say, who ever equalled, the fascinating Buffon, whose style appears, like the Belvidere Apollo, to be the very *beau idéal* of excellence? The meanest subject leaves his hands invested with new attractions, and dressed either magnificently, or with an elegant simplicity that rivets attention. Whether he describe the noble horse, the sanguinary tiger, the insignificant and timid mouse, or the contemptible worm that seems designed only for the food of birds, his magical pen maintains an equable power of exciting interest. He is, undoubtedly, at the head of a few who can force us to read, and this, whatever may be said of *gracefulness, vehemence, vigour*, or other assumed requisites, must be considered as nearly the perfection of writing.

It might be said, with great justice, to be a loss to the literary world, if such a man did not write upon style. Fortunately, however, he did not leave us in this lamentable condition—he did write upon style, and a finer specimen of the *unintelligible explanatory* was never produced. Though he calls it *Règles de l'art d'écrire*, or Rules for the Art of Writing, I may safely assert, that if one had it off by heart it could afford no assistance whatever in the way of instruc-

tion—those who are labouring to acquire a good style would be just as well off if Buffon had locked the essay in his breast. An old woman, on hearing it read through, would probably say, "'Tis very true indeed, and he must be a great man, for he has clearly proved, that if one knows how to write well, one won't write badly." However, it procured Buffon admission to academical honours, and that was something *for himself*. I wish I could give it in full for the gratification of my readers, but it would occupy a dozen of my pages, and that might be considered as an inexcusable sacrifice for mere amusement. I feel, however, that I should not have it, thus, all to myself. There are many who cannot consult the essay, and they may not be altogether contented with my strictures. I therefore present an extract, and, for the satisfaction of those who know French, I give it in the original:—

Le style n'est que l'ordre et le mouvement qu'on met dans ses pensées ; si on les enchaîne étroitement, si on les serre, le style devient ferme, nerveux et concis ; si on les laisse se succéder lentement, et ne se joindre qu'à la faveur des mots, quelque élégans qu'ils soient, le style sera diffus, lâche et traînant.

TRANSLATION.—Style is but the order and the motion that we put into our thoughts ; if we bind them closely, if we press them together, the style becomes firm, nervous, and concise ; if left to follow each other slowly, and only to unite by means of words, however elegant (they may be), the style will be diffuse, loose, and drawing.

This, I believe, is enough. No one who wishes to be taught, will desire any further extract, for this must show, that the remainder is in the same *clear-obscure*, and valuably *instructive* strain, that distinguishes all our dissertations upon style. Buffon's essay may be said to comprise the substance, if any there be, of all that has been written on this subject. However, I do not wish to oppose such considerations. What offends me is, that they are offered to us as regular modes of instruction. Had Buffon entitled his discourse or essay, *Thoughts upon Style*, no one could find fault, but, when he gives it as "Rules," every man of sense must laugh at the foolish pretensions of the *teacher*. What a pity it is, that Doctor Johnson did not think it worth while to attack those *Stylish* pedagogues ! Half a page from such a pen as he wielded would have sufficed to sweep the whole tribe away. He would have exposed their Aristotelian sophistry as forcibly

as he showed the *nothingness* of Pope's "Essay on Man," which fell irrevocably, as soon as the criticism appeared, and it has, ever since, been properly estimated as only a fine piece of poetry, wherein "penury of knowledge and vulgarity of sentiment are so happily disguised, that *the reader feels his mind full though he learns nothing.*"

For purposes that will appear obvious, I have sometimes conversed with good classical scholars, who, to my own knowledge, read in the original and much admired Cicero, Quintilian, and Longinus. After eliciting the most elaborate praise of those authors, for their profound judgment in treating the art of writing, I have requested to know what were the most striking or useful parts of the works, which so much excited their admiration, but I could never extract anything worth remembering. I then compelled them to admit that, as far as respected assistance in style, they had gained no advantage, nor found any rule upon which they could decisively act—that their heads, not their minds, were filled with what they thought was something material, but which the test of remembrance proved to be no more solid than salt or sugar that melts away in plain water. Some of those scholars wrote in a very laboured, ungraceful, and even long-winded style—the only benefit that they derived from their learning was, that they avoided grammatical errors, but for this they were not indebted either to Cicero or Quintilian.

But, if such eminent names effected so little, why should I write on style, who am only as dust in the balance, compared with them? Though I might offer a good defence by referring to the introductory paragraph of this chapter, I may answer more decisively, and yet still admit my inferiority. In the first place, it is well known that the best performers are not always the best teachers, and, in the next, that splendid talents often lead the possessors either to contempt or to ignorance of the meaner elements of a science. Hence, it arises that, when attempting instruction, impatient of rising into the airy *expansum* of sublimities, they pay but little attention to the mere mechanical rudiments—they disdain to stay with humble working mortals, and away they soar into clouds. Now I may be of more *instructive* utility for this

reason, that, having but a very limited genius, I must remain on earth. If I attempt to rise, it can only be a flutter, and I am warned to come down immediately.

There must be some cause for all this unintelligibility and uselessness, and it strikes me that it is for want of applying that great intellectual lever, Induction. By this simple, though gigantic power, Bacon overthrew, at once, the mountain of peripatetic subtilities which mankind was foolishly attempting, for two thousand years, to climb. It is a pity that this grand system, or rather its application, should be so little known. The general opinion is, that it is only of use in philosophy, metaphysics, or the higher branches of the more abstruse sciences, but this is a delusion which, I fear, there are men who have an interest in keeping up. The best explanation that I have seen is in that valuable work, which so well supports its title, "*The Library of useful and entertaining Knowledge.*" In the article on Bacon's "*Organon*," which is suited to general comprehension, Induction is thus explained :—

Bacon proposes the advancement of all kinds of knowledge by induction, *i. e.* a bringing-in; for the plan it unfolds is that of investigating nature, and inquiring after truth, not by reasoning upon mere conjectures about nature's laws and properties, as philosophers had been too much accustomed to do before, but by *bringing together*, carefully and patiently, a variety of particular facts and instances; viewing these in all possible lights; and drawing, from a comparison of the whole, some general principle or truth that applies to all. The foundation of this philosophy lies, in short, in the *history of nature itself*—in making a laborious collection of facts relating to any one subject of inquiry, previous to any attempt at forming a system or theory.

Here we see it fairly stated, as being applicable to *all* kinds of knowledge—*any* subject of inquiry. Indeed we naturally apply it to such things as are simple, but where a difficulty of solution appears, we are too apt to go to the top branches at once, and these being, of themselves, unable to bear the weight of plain inquiry, we lose ourselves in vague and impertinent conjectures. Now I take some merit to myself, for having, as I humbly conceive, laid the base of a rational system for instruction in composition. No doubt that others have written a good deal on perspicuity, and some have also condemned the parenthesis, but I am the first who plainly showed, that long-winded sentences are the

grand obstacle to respectable, or even what we may call *decent*, writing, and that they are the offspring of parentheses. I only pretend, however, to have drawn a rough outline of the first principles of composition—it will, no doubt, be hereafter much improved, and more methodically arranged, by persons better qualified for the task. But, by following the inductive process, I discovered, that the punctuation of the parts or members of sentences *can* be accomplished, with propriety and effect, by the comma and dash only. This I may boldly call a discovery, because it is completely my own, and because this book is, in itself, a proof of my assertion. But as this will be treated elsewhere, we may now dismiss it, and pursue our immediate subject.

Style either can, or cannot, be plainly defined. If it can, the thing has not yet been done, and, if it cannot, the various dissertations upon it tend to no utility, as they must all be mere gratuitous assertions that no one is bound to believe. But when offered as media of instruction, they are worse than useless, because time is, or ought to be, valuable to every one, and it is too bad to seduce us to throw that away, and also our money. What does it signify for a man to show his reading or acumen by giving passages from different authors, and then saying that one is neat, another florid, a third diffuse, and so on? What would be thought of any one who should, by only giving specimens of correctly composed sentences, pretend to teach grammar? Yet all that has been said upon style is not less preposterous. The pupil writes something, which his master says is ungrammatical—he asks why, and is referred to his grammar, by which he discovers his errors, but in respect to style how is he situated? If a question on this point arise, he is only supported or contradicted by the *opinion* of a self-created judge, who decides neither from law nor equity. It reminds one of that jocular rebuke to a patient, who says he is not as well as the physician pronounced him, What, Sir! do you to pretend to know better than the doctor?

Though I think very little about any speculation for teaching different kinds of style, I feel myself called upon to lend my assistance towards checking that system of delu-

sion, which has so successfully imposed upon our understandings, for eighteen hundred years. Now if any one pretend to instruct us in various styles, let him furnish plain proofs that he understands what he professes to teach. This must, surely, be considered a very fair proposition. The test that I propose is simple enough. Let him give a passage, suppose in the plain or perspicuous manner, and then put it into all the different styles upon which he expatiates with so much ardour. I say that if he cannot do this, he should not set up for an instructor. But he will then allege, that this would put down criticism, which we all admit to be necessary for the advancement of literature. I hardly think that such a silly argument could make any impression upon discriminating minds. Criticism is quite different from what is now under consideration, and all critical strictures, whether they appear in newspapers or in books, contribute to improve our taste, to enlarge our views, and to regulate our judgment.

I am inclined to think, that I come in a favourable time with this discussion on style. The public mind seems to be in a proper state for throwing off the fetters of mysticism in everything, and requiring intelligible directions, instead of the solemn, but unmeaning, jargon that so long held our judgment captive. We see it in every particular, whether in politics, in literature, or in private concerns, and we see it, in the most forcible manner, on the stage. The ghost of Hamlet, that used to make men afraid to go to bed in the dark, is now laughed at by the very children. Some have lamented the evident decline of tragedy, for the last quarter of a century, as a proof of declension in good taste, but many persons take it in an opposite view. Most tragedies elevate or debase men beyond probability—they seem too like the fairy tales, which have almost ceased to amuse even the simple country swain. Comedy and farce, therefore, appear to be pushing *ideal* tragedy “from its stool,” because, there, we see life as it is, or at least as it *may* be. Even musical operas are preferred to tragedies, though it is not less ridiculous to *sing* out the common occurrences of life than for a hero, who is writhing in the agonies of death from a painful

wound, to take his last farewell of this wicked world in good set poetry.

As my view of style is somewhat new, it is necessary for me to take care, that I be not misrepresented or misunderstood. I may expect certain persons to say, that I am, either so pertinaciously wrapped up in my plainness, or so incapable of anything higher, that I would, if I had the power, quaker-like, make the whole world a single-breasted, grey-coated creation. Gentlemen, do not thus deceive yourselves or others. I am equally anxious as you for elegance and improvement, but I deprecate the custom of publishing expensive books on style, and giving as instructive, what is only an ostentatious display of reading, speculation, and opinion. If I could, I would write in a more attractive and polished style, because I know that it must give increased weight and importance to my work, but though, through poverty of talent, I cannot dress my thoughts in finery, that is no reason why I should not admire beauty and ornament. Do not imagine that I could not, like others, expatiate on elegant composition in rapturous, though homely terms, and lose myself in admiration of the majestic simplicity of the Scriptures, the sublimity of a Milton, the colossal weight of a Johnson, or the luxuriancy of a Moore. But this is not strictly fair when asking the public to pay for "instructions." Again I direct your attention to the test that I have proposed. If you set up to teach a dozen or two of styles, prove that you understand them, by exhibiting the substance of even but one passage in them all severally, as musicians transpose the same air into twelve different keys of the major or minor modes. I offer the following, for your greater convenience:—

Socrates has received perhaps the highest praise ever awarded to frail man. A heathen—he has been pronounced the "first Christian," though he died many centuries before Christianity was known! while modern history has not hesitated to declare him, "the greatest mere man that ever existed!" Such is the effect of stern virtue and inflexible rectitude.

Now, Gentlemen, call this if you please, as a starting point, the *Concise*. Then give it to us in the *Diffuse*, then in the *Nervous*, then in the *Feeble*, the *Vehement*, and pray do not forget the *NEAT*, and so on through all the various grades, upon which you so particularly insist, and upon which you

write so much and so sagaciously. The challenge is perfectly fair. If you decline it, your "occupation is gone," and you must give up the business of style-master.

The only way to arrive at any useful or intelligible definition of style, with a view to teaching, or to positive instruction, is by "collecting facts and instances," and after much reflection, and I may say, laborious investigation, my belief is, that there are but two kinds upon which we can work with certainty—the long-winded, and the perspicuous. As for the first, every one knows and comprehends it well, and there are more practical proofs of it than we can desire. It may truly be called the *first*—indeed it is almost the natural, or at least, the common, style, for all inexperienced or uninformed writers, and many who know grammar too, and whom we account good scholars, are prone to drawling. None, except the few who are highly gifted, commence by *writing* pithy or well-proportioned sentences, however they may speak in a terse or concise manner, and as this is a tangible part of the subject, and capable of clear explanation, it should be the nucleus of any system of instruction. Perspicuity CAN be taught. Any master who knows his business can correct long-windedness as regularly as grammatical errors. In this, there is nothing mysterious or abstruse—nothing that calls for those metaphysical descriptions, that we must only conceive but not touch. The thing is quite mechanical, and may be taught to any boy or man of tolerable capacity.

The business then should be, simply, TO TEACH PERSPICUITY BY CORRECTING LONG-WINDEDNESS. After that, if the pupil have the bent or talent, nothing can prevent him from getting into the graceful, the florid, the vehement, the nervous, or any other style to which his genius inclines. But if it be maintained, and observe that I do not wish to dispute the *possibility*, that various styles can be taught or acquired by instruction, it is indispensable that they, who proffer tuition, should be able to meet the test that I have already proposed. They will find, by careful induction, that there is no other *earthly* plan for accomplishing the purpose, and, if they be not incorrigible devotees, they will also discover the important, though to them disagreeable, fact, that the public mind is now prepared to scout the grave delusions of literary astrology.

It may be satisfactory to explain, why I have selected the word *long-winded*, which is certainly not the most elegant. Writers on style call it the *diffuse*, but, as this does not exactly convey my meaning, I rather choose to leave it to themselves. One may be diffuse without being long-winded. We may be excessively tedious and insipid—we may introduce a number of perfectly unnecessary exceptions and impertinent remarks, and yet all this in well-proportioned and pleasing sentences. But your long-winded gentleman cannot come to close, in a reasonable time, on any occasion. He must bring in his *ifs*, and *ands*, and *buts*, and *thoughts*, and *whiches*, and *notwithstandings*, until he compels us to do the very reverse of what he wishes—to throw away his writing.

It is, in fact, the first principle of composition, rather than any kind of style, that I would inculcate, and which I should wish to be inferred and understood. For this reason I prefer *perspicuous* to the *concise*, which our commentators on style oppose to the diffuse. Conciseness is too much to expect from ordinary pens. To unfold our thoughts with ease, and to exhibit them without redundancy of expression, is only for the gifted few. A Tacitus or a Montesquieu cannot be looked for every day, but what I call perspicuity is now expected from every one, no matter how poor the language. Whatever might be done in folio-volume times, we will not, in the present day, labour to find out meaning. If we do not readily understand, we will not grope our way to sense, unless where our interest is very materially concerned.

CHAPTER VII.

PUNCTUATION.

THE separation of sentences into convenient portions for emphasis and pausing, is called punctuation, or pointing. This is effected by seven stops or points, which you will find after their names, thus:—

Comma , Semicolon ; Colon : Dash — Period . Note of interrogation ? Note of admiration !

Comma.

Of these the comma, being oftener introduced than any other, is the first in importance. Besides, its use is more easily learned, and less judgment is required in assigning its proper place. We may generally put it, whenever we think that there is an ordinary rest before the conclusion of a sentence. There is, indeed, some difficulty in what is called high pointing, of which the following is a specimen :—

Now, though this may, and too often can, be, and is still, considered, by many persons, as a direct infringement, yet, seeing that, under all the circumstances, men will, in despite of law, run those risks, we cannot, here, take it into serious account.

In this very highly-pointed sentence there are sixteen commas, which, without any palpable impropriety, may be thus reduced to four :—

Now though this may and too often can be, and is still considered by many persons as a direct infringement, yet seeing that under all the circumstances, men will in despite of law run those risks, we cannot here take it into serious account.

High pointing, when not carried too far, is very expressive, and it much assists a reader. It is, comparatively, only of recent date, and is, I think, a considerable improvement, as it relieves us from the frequent semicolons so embarrassing to inexperienced punctuators. But it must not be used at random. You must always observe that it have an easy and natural union—though you separate the parts, their connections must be kept in view. This can be made plainer by an example. Seeing a comma mostly after *but*, especially when beginning a sentence, you are led to place it there on all occasions, and you thus commit unpardonable breaches of propriety.

But, not being able to procure a horse, he was obliged to walk home.

But, he could not procure a horse, and was obliged to walk home.

The first of these examples is pointed right, and the second wrong. Both express the same thing, although there is some slight difference in words. If you reflect a little, and try to find out, after what has been previously said, the erroneous pointing, you must discover the blunder. Here is the test.

Join *But* to *he was obliged to walk home*, and you have some sense—join *But* to *and was obliged to walk home*, and it tells nothing. Therefore, in the first example, you are authorised to put a comma after *But*, and, in the second, I hope that you now perceive why there should be none. I must also remark that, in the first, there is no *necessity* for a comma after *But*. This is only high pointing, which may or may not be adopted, but if we begin with it we should continue. For want of proper attention, some persons unnecessarily mix it with the ordinary mode, and this, in punctuation, is equally blameable as it is in grammar, when speaking of parliament, to say, *it* is not consulting the interest of the nation, and, before the conclusion of the sentence, to tell us that *they* are irritating the people.

However, some latitude may be even here allowed. The most uniform punctuator will be sometimes, one might almost say, forced into deviations, and, according as he feels, so will his pointing change. The following sentence may explain:—

Having shown this to be frequently the cause of foolish quarrels, I think that we ought to exert ourselves for its suppression.

Should the writer have previously dwelt, particularly, on the immense number of quarrels occasioned, he would, if a high pointer, place *frequently* between two commas, but, not having that so much in view as the folly of their origin, he uses the less marked punctuation. But as you see that high pointing presents, at least, *some* difficulties—as it can be dispensed with, and as its rules are, by no means, invariably fixed, your best plan will be, to follow the common mode, until you find that you understand the other. Some practice on high pointing is, however, instructive, and by observing the newspapers and modern books, you will easily learn enough for your information. Besides being a considerable aid to perspicuity, it actually leads to grammatical knowledge, as I think I can now clearly show by the following example:—

On your way to London, do not fail to call at my house, where you will find two old acquaintances, whom you would say are truly pleasant fellows.

Observe this attentively. There is hardly anything more difficult, for those who know nothing of grammar, than this

word *whom*. It is always their puzzle, and, when they put it right, they only do so by chance. Had you to write anything like the example given, you would, doubtless, set it down in the same manner. *Whom you would say are truly pleasant fellows*, does not appear to have anything harsh or unnatural—it reads well enough to your ears. But submit it to the test of high pointing, and you then see that *whom* is a blunder :—

whom, you would say, are truly pleasant fellows.

By thus separating the component parts, you immediately perceive that *whom are* will not do, for you know and feel that *who are* is what is always said. You would yourself laugh at *whom are truly pleasant fellows*, but the syntactical absurdity was concealed by the intervening words, until you dissected the member.

This is more important than you may imagine. I assure you, that many persons who have learned, and who think that they know, grammar, would write *whom* instead of *who*, as in the example. Yet this is but one out of some hundred capital errors, that you may discover through high pointing, as the following simple example will show :—

“Blackstone’s Commentaries” though a work of acknowledged ability, is now of little use without explanatory notes.

This reads smoothly enough as it is, but, if we put a comma after Commentaries, we see that *work* is not our nominative, and that *are* is required instead of *is*. Lest you should be in doubt on some occasions, it is right to notice, that you may put a comma after *but*, *for*, *this*, and other such words, where more than one member intervenes, when there is anything like connection with that towards which it bears. You will find an instance in the following, where you see that the *For* reads smooth with *we*, and thus authorises the comma :—

For, notwithstanding his having gone, in winter, to Moscow, where he found the cold excessive, and which confined him, without intermission, six weeks to his room, we could not induce him to come home.

In cases of inversion, the comma may be used, when it would not be proper in plain construction :—

Against any such wanton extravagance, I solemnly protest.

Here, the natural run of expression being inverted, the comma is necessary, though in the following, which is the regular order, none could, with propriety, be introduced :—

I solemnly protest against any such wanton extravagance.

This also explains why a comma may be, sometimes, put after a single word beginning a sentence, though it have no connection with any of the following members, as in this instance :—

Formerly, parentheses were so much used, or rather abused, that few writers escaped being drawling and intolerably tiresome.

In this example the comma is proper, though *Formerly* will not connect with the first words of the following members, because the regular place for it, in the ordinary train of construction, is after *abused*. If you knew grammar, you would more easily understand this, by the distinction of adverbs and conjunctions.

You will, sometimes, write a very long member of a sentence, which seems too protracted to be read in one breath. On those occasions, never torment yourself about the impropriety of dividing it, but make the separations, at once, according to your first impressions. After reading it, put commas wherever you think that one might possibly pause, or wish a momentary rest, though the direct connection will be broken. This is now done by the most eminent authors—it is even admitted by the grammar-writers, and that will be, for you, sufficient authority. Suppose that you put down the following :—

Though it will hardly be believed that this old and infirm gentleman often rode into the loneliest and most dangerous parts of that wild and almost savage country with no other security from robbers than his dog and his grey-headed servant, yet he——

You would be vexed at seeing such a seemingly indivisible piece of composition, but do not stop to puzzle yourself a moment about the impossibility of proper separation. Take the pen that you are needlessly biting, out of your mouth, and boldly put a comma after *believed*, *loneliest*, *country*, and *robbers*, for this is allowable, and even more, if you choose high pointing. Give it to half a dozen grammarians who have, each, treated of punctuation, and you may be

certain that no two of them will point it alike. This shows the value of their rules, and how near they are to a regular system.

When speaking of high pointing I said that it relieved us from the constant use of semicolons, but I do not think that I explained this sufficiently clear, and we shall take the following example :—

Men too often fight about mere trifles; but after a little reflection, they feel ashamed.

Men too often fight about mere trifles, but, after a little reflection, they feel ashamed.

The first is the old, and the second the new, mode of pointing. The reader cannot fail of seeing the comma after *but*, quite time enough to give the proper tone, and that is much better than imagining a certain rest or pause after *trifles*. In this respect, our old teachers were truly ridiculous, and we may now fairly say, that they made their pupils long-winded readers. Those portions of silence that they enjoined on each stop, gave a drawling character to the best and most lively composition. As young ladies used to be told a hundred times a day, to hold up their heads and keep in their chins, so the never-ending command of our school-masters was, “Mind your stops.” This made their *scholars* read in the most tiresome, spiritless, and sing-song manner, as they could not, at once, *keep time*, and enunciate properly. For reading, therefore, the frequent comma is a great improvement, because it is not by regularly-measured cessations, but by a sensible and well-directed emphasis, that our hearers can understand with facility and satisfaction. It is the division of the members, more than any variety of points, that should guide, and thus it is that we often involuntarily, and without any instructions, very judiciously give to a comma, the time *anciently* fixed and settled for a colon.

Semicolon.

One of the greatest improvements in punctuation is the rejection of the eternal semicolons of our ancestors. In the preceding article I observed, that high pointing relieved us from this embarrassment, and I think that I am sustained in

the assertion. In latter times, the semicolon has been gradually disappearing, not only from the newspapers, but from books—inso-much that I believe instances could now be produced, of entire pages without a single semicolon.

This must be considered as an improvement. It has rendered punctuation much simpler, and none but interested quacks, or wretched cavillers at straws, can delight in mysteries. What a quantity of useless controversial stuff has been written upon the “proper” use of the semicolon and colon! But I am wrong in saying that it was useless. For at last, seeing such interminable contests amongst the doughty disputants, common sense prevailed, and the public settled the business by throwing their two favourite stops overboard. The schoolmasters, however, picked them up, and are still striving to keep them afloat, but all will not do, though they have contrived to maintain the semicolon above water.

In such a sentence as this, “Letters from Oxford state that a great excitation prevailed in the University, but we do not believe it,” there would, formerly, be a semicolon after *University*. Every one now, except the old stop-masters, can see that it is not only unnecessary but ridiculous. In fact, the semicolon may be dispensed with—nay, it is useless, except in cases of detail, or where it may be judicious to avoid too many simple sentences. Yet, even in such instances, the dash is a proper substitute. But where the stream of sense or connection is, in any way, concerned or understood, a comma is the proper divisional mark, unless on occasions where a kind of hiatus, or a fresh expression of force, might require the dash. You have seen by the extract from Robertson a sort of proof that the semicolon implies presumptive weakness in the construction of a sentence, and, by duly considering that, you will be enabled to estimate the great importance of the comma.

Colon.

I cannot here resist the opportunity of punning—the colon has been literally *dashed* to pieces. This puzzling stop, the

right application of which, many an intelligent youth strove, in vain, to comprehend, is now most efficiently superseded by a little insignificant line. The dash has decided its fate, and, as it is unnecessary for me to descant on its *former* use, I shall proceed to explain the functions of its conqueror. In fact the history, not only of the colon and semicolon but of the comma too, is so unavoidably connected with the dash as not to be completely separable. The next article must, therefore, embrace many considerations that may seem not to strictly belong to its immediate subject.

Dash.

The introduction of this stop is a most important accession. It completes the system of punctuation, removes all its doubts and difficulties, and leaves its study unembarrassed by subtleties. It puts simplicity in the place of mystery, gives decision in lieu of hesitation, divests ignorance of its imposing mask, and strips artifice of its deceptions solemnities.

This is saying a good deal, but I hope to substantiate it all before I shall have done. I cannot help thinking, that the dash came only just in good time, to save us from new quibbles, and vexatious impositions. It seemed highly probable, that the old schoolmasters and grammarians would have called in music to their aid, and regulated punctuation accordingly. They seemed not to be at all satisfied with their system of pauses. Some of them fixed a comma *one*, a semi-colon *two*, a colon *four*, and the period and notes of interrogation and exclamation *six*. Others had it regular from the comma to the colon, *one, two, three*, but then, as they dared not shorten the period, though it was reduced to four in later times, the jump from *three* to *six* was not liked, and therefore, the most popular arrangement was *one, three, four*, and *six*.

After this manner, did those buzzards proceed to *instruct* youth, and it is easy to perceive, that they could not have much longer continued such an ill-contrived farce. Either a new stop, as a mean between the comma and the semicolon, would have been introduced, to *complete* their system,

or they must have regulated the pauses, as in music, by rests. Something to authorise this supposition may be gathered from their books. We should, then, have had semiquaver, quaver, crotchet, minim, and probably semi-breve, rests. The speed of counting them in reading, would depend on the gravity or the lightness of the subject, and, on taking up a book, it would be necessary to consider whether the *movement* should be *adagio* or *allegro*!

In the midst of their laudable schemes for our benefit, the dash made its appearance, and was, at first, very kindly received. Ever desirous of multiplying difficulties, they were just beginning to assign it a place next the colon, with a rest of *five*, when they perceived that it aimed at the expulsion of that stop. The old *legitimates* got alarmed, but it was too late—the dash, in spite of their calumnies, proceeded fearlessly, and not only banished the whole colon, but reduced the half one to the most pitiable state of insignificance.

The dash, though sometimes elliptically used in ancient books, may be said to have come in about the time of Sterne, who used it to satiety, for the purpose of giving to his writings that sudden transitive singularity of which he was not a little vain. After being tried by others, in the same manner, without success, the undefined and dissatisfactory nature of the colon suggested a different use, and it soon assumed the character of a regular stop. As the colon retreated, its half-brother declined so much in importance that we are now independent of both one and the other.

The dash is not yet much used in France, except in something after Sterne's fashion, and to distinguish new paragraphs in the public prints. It is, however, making some progress, as every thing must, that is of such obvious utility. M. Catineau, in the grammar prefixed to his learned dictionary, thus speaks of it:—

The mark of separation (—), which the printers call a dash, serves to replace the says he, and says she, which, in dialogues, render the narration drawing and insipid. Sometimes, also, it answers for a paragraph. This sign, in use a long time among the English, is only employed in France since a few years past. It is, I believe, to Marmontel, that we are indebted for its introduction into our literary works.

I scarcely know where to begin to show the numerous

uses of the dash. It might suffice to say, that where there is any doubt it may be introduced, for no one can be at a loss with respect to the comma. This appears to be an advantage. We have, in fact, but two points to manage, because the notes of interrogation and admiration, with the period, have their places so plainly fixed, that they require no consideration. Perhaps it may be said that, formerly, they contrived to do very well without the dash, and that it must, therefore, be superfluous, but this I cannot admit. They did *not* do very well, formerly, without it, for I contend that it has improved our style, and enabled us to denote our meaning more clearly. The cumbrous machinery of colons and semicolons, retarding the conclusive sense, afforded a constant opening for the parenthesis, which may be called the Paul Pry of composition. Yet, where there is none, either direct or implied, we see, by the following example, that those stops add neither force nor beauty to composition :—

The dens of lions and nurseries of wolves know no such cruelty as this : these savage inhabitants of the desert obey God and nature in their being tender and careful of their offspring : they will hunt, watch, fight, and almost starve for the preservation of their young ; never part with them, never forsake them, till they are able to shift for themselves.

This is a specimen of the mysteries of punctuation, before the dash was known. It is from Locke's "Government," Book i. Sect. 56 ; but there is another further on in Book ii. Sect. 6, showing three colons, with some semicolons, and containing altogether 144 words ! The consequence was, that the sentences were protracted to a tiresome extent, and, what was worse, punctuation appeared, to ordinary capacities, such a very difficult matter, that it was given up as belonging only to the learned world !

The dash has chased away all this necromancy, and drawn aside the mysterious curtain that concealed the simplicity of punctuation. I think the following arrangement more pleasing than Mr. Locke's mode :—

The dens of lions, and the nurseries of wolves, know no such cruelty as this. These savage inhabitants of the desert obey God and nature, in their being tender and careful of their offspring. They will hunt, watch, fight, and almost starve for the preservation of their young—never part with them, never forsake them, till they are able to shift for themselves.

I stand upon this. Give me any coloned and semicoloned sentence whatever, and, if I cause no improvement, I engage to make it read as forcibly with only the comma and dash. And see with what ease this can be done. In the preceding, though I did not alter or add a single word, I had only occasion to use one dash, and, there, I do maintain, that it is far superior in fitness, to either the colon or semicolon. I admit that there is no long-windedness in the sentence, but I have, in Chapter II, given sufficient proof of my being able to correct that also, without using the old stops.

The more that I examine this matter, the more I am convinced, that the composition of sentences requires only the comma and dash. I say that it requires only those two stops, because, though I might not absolutely prohibit the semicolon in details, it will be seen that I use neither whole nor half-colon myself, and that such total rejection is no disadvantage. As for the :— at the disjunction of a paragraph, it is only a breaker, and I use it merely because I find that it is now, on such occasions, customary, or *fashionable*, in printing, and I am not disposed to quarrel about trifles. It there looks very striking, and it is particularly explicative, where we have to say much, after referring to a quotation, as in the paragraph following. It seems to say, "Here is now the extract of which I spoke." I think, indeed, that the colon, with or without the dash, might be *solely* confined to this station. The .— is also used by printers for what are called *side heads*, as in the translation from Buffon, but with such marks we have no concern, for they cannot be said to interfere with the main object of punctuation. It must be understood, however, that I have no objection to the colon or semicolon, in the titles of books. There, show and appearance are allowable, and an author should always consign their punctuation to the better judgment of the printer. The writer is not supposed to be concerned with either the pointing or the arrangement of his title-page, chapter headings, index, or such things as must be controlled by the fashion of the day. Two dashes are now very much used instead of the upright curves for parentheses, as, "Our readers must, by this time, be fully convinced—for we have

often impressed it on them—that a fair representation only can insure justice.” The old () is rarely used of late except to enclose some referential remark. Mr. Lennie says that “commas are now used instead of parentheses,” and that is true since the introduction of high pointing.

The following is extracted from a newspaper. It is given as a specimen of one of those permissible *detail* sentences already explained, where the semicolon claims admittance. I have, here, an opportunity of exhibiting the superiority of the dash, over that or the colon. Place one or the other in its stead, and if you have to comment upon every assertion which it separates, your eye will not so readily glance upon the next in succession as when marked by the dash. Nay, you could reckon them in half the time, should you have occasion to say, “here are eight distinct assertions, besides the conclusive deduction or inference.” According to my custom in quotation, I make no change in the original punctuation, but I must observe that it requires none, for the pointing is, in my opinion, unobjectionable:—

If it had been the professed object of Captain Hall to write a political work, all this would have been very well, although, even then, it would have been quite possible to show that a government, under which the inhabitants of the United States have lived, upwards of forty years, in the enjoyment of domestic tranquillity and of almost uninterrupted peace—a government, which has carried them triumphantly through a war with the most powerful nation of Europe—under which pathless forests have been converted into fruitful plains—insignificant villages have sprung into noble cities—commercial intercourse has been established with every region of the earth—education has been fostered—knowledge of every kind has been promoted—religion has flourished, and a greater degree of personal happiness and comfort has been enjoyed, than has fallen to the lot of any nation in Europe—it would, we say, have been quite possible to show that a government that has produced such effects as these, cannot really be quite so bad as the aristocratic prejudices of Hall induced him to think.

Having now instanced the superiority and strength of the dash over our two consumptive claimants for pre-eminence, I shall put it in a still more advantageous light by demonstrating that it is the *only* stop that we can, with strict and unexceptionable propriety, use on some occasions. Not to multiply examples, I refer you to page 16, and there, I say, that the dash after *fruit* is the only stop capable of expressing that kind of nondescript vacation or sudden halt, which so

elegantly and so happily supplies the place of the slovenly &c. The following is also another elucidation :—

What a lamentable situation his! Wife, children, mother, sisters, friends—all desert this hapless victim of perfidy and ingratitude!

Formerly a colon would come after *friends*, but now that we have the more expressive dash, no one of good taste could adopt any other stop.

Some, who carry their notions of aspect to great refinement, condemn the dash on account of its *appearance*. Were no other than the regular letters of the text used in printing, this might have some weight, but when we have large and small type, italics, words and sentences in large and small capitals, Greek characters, figures, stars, and various referential marks, it is childish to start this as an objection. Besides, those attempts do not always turn out to be improvements. I have seen a work on which no expense was spared, where figures were excluded, and I cannot forget how painful it was to read the “Reign of George III.” Dates and large sums constantly occurred, and instead of “March 23rd, 1789, £3,489,642:16:7½ were voted,” which the eye would take in at a glance, the sight was distressed by full words, thus—

March twenty-third, one thousand, seven hundred and eighty-nine, three millions, four hundred and eighty-nine thousand, six hundred and forty-two pounds, sixteen shillings and seven pence half-penny were voted.

This may please more refined judges of elegance, but I confess that I am so stupid as not to see any advantage in giving us unnecessary and unprofitable labour. I think it would be an improvement, to use an *m* where there are even millions, as thus :—

The national debt was £239*m.* in 1793, and was then little more than a century old. In 1815 it was 858*m.*, which shows an addition of 619*m.* in 22 years. It is now nearly 800*m.*, and the interest alone is 29*m.* We granted 20*m.* to our West India merchants on the abolition of slavery, but they got only about 15*m.*, for the expenses of distribution consumed a good part of the remaining 5*m.*

No one could mistake this *m*, and it would greatly relieve the eye, for, in the preceding paragraph, it saves no fewer than 48 ciphers. I strongly recommend its consideration to our newspapers, which are always foremost in every thing concerning literary improvement. It need not be confined to money, as it would be found useful in rough notices of the

population of different countries, and of other matters. I am almost inclined to recommend a *t* where even hundred thousands occur, as 750*t*. for 750,000, but it is not prudent to ask too much at once. When we get the *m* it will be time enough to look for the *t*.

Punctuation, as we understand it, was unknown to the old Greeks and Romans, though some allusion to it, not well understood now, is made by Cicero. It is a modern invention, and has certainly made very slow progress towards system, for all the rules, as laid down by grammarians, have tended rather to mysteise than to elucidate. The general definition of a colon is, that it is next to a period, but not quite so complete, because, though it contain the substance, something may be added to further strengthen the sense. Let us see how this explanation is sustained. There can be but one period used for a sentence, and that marks its termination. So far we can proceed securely, for, in this, all the grammarians agree. Now, if the colon be only merely not a period because something more may be added, surely, when that something is added, there ought to be a period, and the sentence should conclude. Yet, in defiance of this obvious inference from their own express descriptions, nothing is said against two or more colons in one sentence—thus admitting the monstrosity of two or more sentences in one!

This deserves most particular notice. It puts in the strongest possible light the absurdity of those rules that were so plausibly laid down, and yet so palpably outraged by the makers themselves. A more egregious instance of legislation and mal-application can hardly be adduced. The *law*, clearly, authorised but one colon in a sentence, and yet the unfortunate student was, constantly, appalled by two or three, in the most *legitimate* writings of the day!

A favourite use of the colon, as given by grammarians, is, to separate the great component parts of a comparison, and in this they are so decisive, that they always explain it by such an example as the following :—

As men, from want of proper reflection, unthinkingly defend the grossest errors, and thereby cause much confusion and mischief : so, a monkey has, unwittingly, cut its throat by imitating its master at shaving.

Now, I say, that there should be neither colon, nor semicolon, but a simple comma, after *mischief*. The colon would never have been introduced here, but for that fruitful source of vicious punctuation, the vain attempt to fix portions of time for pausing on each stop. Take away the *As* and begin with *Men*, and then, indeed, there may be some sense in the colon. I would, however, recommend the dash, because the reason of its appropriation is more easily comprehended by the pupil. Is he not to be pitied, in being at the mercy of all those who choose to give their own capricious explanations of the colon and semicolon? I now find, on looking into Mr. Lindley Murray's grammar, that he adopts the semicolon, in simile or comparison, though his predecessors insisted on the colon!

If the pupil look into books where those stops are used, he is involved in a labyrinth of vagaries. Here is a sentence from Richardson's *preface* to "*Clarissa Harlowe*," which I may very fairly quote, because it is punctuated with considerable attention to colons, and semicolons, as if he was anxious to distinguish it particularly from the work itself, which is *dashed* with an awful prodigality:—

The principal of those two young ladies is proposed as an exemplar to her sex: nor is it any objection to her being so, that she is not in all respects a perfect character.

Here there should be no colon, for the first five words after *sex* are equivalent to, *and it is no objection*—which would require only a comma previously. I suppose our author wished, that the reader should rest after *sex* until he could count three or four! But he is no example for punctuation. His notions on this subject are too chaotic for criticism. He saw certain charms in the dash, that seemed to favour his crude conception of boldness, and he uses, or rather abuses, it most licentiously.

But as I know that Richardson would be supported by hundreds of grammarians, in putting a colon after *sex*, this, and other such attempts at rules, show us that they must only increase the difficulties of the learner. Supposing that he has to write something like the following:—

I offered him my house at Richmond, but he would not listen to that, nor would he remain in London.

Could he, I say, be blamed for putting a colon after *that*? And, if anything like fixed meaning can be gathered from the rules, he would be justified in clapping a semicolon to Richmond. The sentence, then, stands thus:—

I offered him my house at Richmond; but he would not listen to that: nor would he remain in London.

Look at it. There is a sentence pointed according to the directions of learned men—ay, of men who can see, distinctly, six cases to every one of our simple nouns.

I must not pass by Mr. Murray's notice of the dash. Here is one of his examples for its use:—

If acting conformably to the will of our Creator;—if promoting the welfare of mankind around us;—if securing our own happiness;—are objects of the highest moment:—then we are loudly called upon, to cultivate and extend the great interests of religion and virtue.

What, give us a new task! Had we not enough to manage already, without double stops? No, Mr. Murray, this will not do. Take away your three semicolons, and put a comma in place of your coloned dash, and then the sentence will be properly and intelligibly pointed. What do those stopped dashes signify? If such unmeaning double pointing be allowed, the dash may indeed be “a perilous thing for a young grammarian to handle.” But let no such absurd misapplications deter you. I have shown that the use of the dash is, not only very easy but uncommonly simple. Mr. Murray, though I am sure unthinkingly, would introduce a new difficulty, still more incomprehensible than the colon and semicolon. We had nearly reached the top of the mountain, when a new and unexpected obstacle is opposed.

If such fatuity be tolerated, why then, fill the cup of nonsense to the brim, and give us the “punctum minusculum,” or little *period*, which modern sagacity has brought into the *middle* of sentences in ancient Latin. Mr. Mair has given an admirable reason for retaining it in his “Cortius’ Sallust”—that he finds it is used in Germany and Holland! That was so unanswerable, that he preserves it in the English part also, as *per* following beautiful instance, Bel. Cat. cap. 7:—

But the state having obtained its liberty, it is incredible to say how great it grew in a short time. such an appetite for glory had now prevailed.

What are your stopped-dashed, or trebly-coloned sentences, compared to this? Mr. Mair says, that the punctum minusculum is greater than the colon or semicolon, but not so great as the great period! This should not be overlooked by the stop-dash improvers of punctuation, and they ought to order me a piece of plate for such a valuable hint. Mr. Mair is so fond of this dwarf period, that he uses it in the English, as will be seen in the subjoined extract, when it is not in the Latin, but that may be in compliment to the Dutch and Germans :—

Igitur de Catilinæ conjuratione, quam verissime potero, paucis absolvam. Nam id facinus in primis ego memorabile existumo, sceleris atque periculi novitate.

Accordingly, I shall discuss briefly *the story* of Catiline's conspiracy, with as great a regard to truth as I can. for I esteem that enterprise eminently remarkable for the strangeness of the wickedness and danger *that attended it*.

I have endeavoured, in vain, to comprehend, by the most careful and unprejudiced perusal, what particular impression authors wish to make by,—;—:— in the body of a sentence, and, as men of sense, they will allow, that their readers ought to be the best judges of this matter. There is no use in writing if we have not readers. It is for them, and not for ourselves, that we write, and we should keep in view only what they can comprehend, and not what seems to defy communication, or but floats in our own imagination. If the dash is to be thus disfigured, and made a new source of ambiguities, better it were never invented—better to hobble on, as formerly, with our enigmatical colons and semicolons. But I again entreat you not to be daunted or misled by such preposterous innovations. You now know the legitimate and reasonable use of the dash, and with that, and the comma, you can give the greatest force, and the clearest character, to every expression, so as that the reader cannot possibly misconceive your meaning and intention.

I shall now give an extract from Mr. Murray's article on punctuation, to show of what little use his rules, or those of others, can be, for the colon or semicolon :—

In the generality of compound sentences there is frequent occasion for commas: as will appear from the following view of the different occasions to which they are adapted.

No one could, even from Mr. Murray's own colon directions, think it right to put that stop after *commas*. It might, indeed, be admissible, had he said *this will*, instead of *as will*, but, in the present form, common sense points out that it should be a comma. Such, however, are the inconsistencies to which the most careful are liable, when they fill their heads with imaginary notions of propriety, and attach importance to things whose power is only illusory.

Long Dash.

Hitherto, I have only treated of the short dash, and I shall now explain the functions of the long one, which, as I before observed, may be about double the length of the other.

It serves to mark omissions, and unseemly or dangerous words, or what may be necessary for concealment :—

On Monday last Mr. A—— was seen near his uncle's at—— House, and then took the road to—— Villa. Our information is authentic, but we give no names, because his father will know what the blanks mean.

It serves to mark fragments, or detached quotations :—

Hume, fancifully relating King Charles's execution, says—It is impossible to describe the grief, indignation, and astonishment which took place—— Women are said to have cast forth the untimely fruit of their womb—— some suddenly fell down dead——The very pulpits were bedewed with unsuborned tears——. But, although the feeling may have been very strong, it is evident that this account borders on the marvellous.

Were it not for the dashes, the foregoing should be given in some such manner as this :—

"It is impossible to describe the grief, indignation, and astonishment which took place" * * * * "Women are said to have cast forth the untimely fruit of their womb" * * * * "Some suddenly fell down dead" * * * * "The very pulpits were bedewed with unsuborned tears."

If the stars be not inserted, I suppose the colon must come in, and I submit to any unprejudiced reader, whether mine is not equally plain, without all this trouble—to say nothing of the frequent turned commas. The dash after *says*, shows that the first quotation is not the commencement of Hume's account—the second shows a new quotation—the third, by having a small *s* to *some*, shows that what follows down to *dead*, is a fragment of that sentence of which, what imme-

diately preceded was a portion—the fourth, a new quotation from a new sentence, and the fifth, by having a period at the extremity, denotes the conclusion of all the borrowed matter. It appears to me, that everything that can be desired for precision, is here embraced. As for the , which is so much used by the French printers, I consider it only as an evasion of the elliptical dash, and it should be confined to its proper place—to direct the eye along a vacancy, towards figures or other things near the margin.

I am induced to recommend the long dash instead of the &c., in those cases, where that objectionable abbreviation may be tolerated. In page 5, after *infant*, it would do without any stop after it, and, in page 17, it might be put after *purpose*, with a comma at the end.

In an interrupted dialogue, I know of no stop that could, unexceptionably, supply the long dash. If we leave only a blank, there may, in some instances, be a doubt whether the printer omitted something :—

Q. Did you see James at any time on Tuesday? Was he —

A. I'll not say as to *any* time, but he —

Q. I ask plainly was he in —

A. I know what you mean, but I do not think —

This appears to be very expressive. Without any explanation, we see, at once, that A first interrupted Q—that Q then interrupted A, who in turn interrupted Q.

Mr. Murray admits the long dash, for omissions, and calls it an “ellipsis,” and others use it to denote a new paragraph, where space is valuable. As it is right that you should perfectly understand this, I shall particularly explain it. If room were a great object to me, I would, instead of leaving a break after the last Q, go on with the next word, drawing a line after the period, thus, Q.—Mr. Murray. You see that this is a very unimportant purpose for the dash. The French, in their newspapers, and sometimes in books, place a short one *before* a paragraph commencing a new subject. This is in order that the reader may not confound the different articles, as each may contain either one or several paragraphs. But there seems to be no necessity for any such thing.

I shall now explain what M. Catineau means by the *says he*, and *says she*, as already quoted. Suppose a narration like the following :—

Emilia and Henry being now alone, she said, "I am sorry to see you so dejected" — "How can I be otherwise after your cruel behaviour" — "Cruel! why it is all your own fault" — "My fault! How can you say such a thing? Did I not" — "Now if you only be calm for a moment, I shall satisfactorily" — "Impossible! Give me a promise that you will never see Mainville again, and that you will" — "Have patience for one moment, and I will explain all."

Here you see that our friend, the dash, saves the *says hes* and *says shes*, and renders it unnecessary to describe the impetuous interruptions of the impassioned Henry. We can even see, by the long dash after *will*, that he was rather stopped by his own rage than by Emilia, and that she took advantage of the pause, to soften his furious jealousy. Could your colons and semicolons do all this?

Having now relieved you from all the vexations, difficulties, and perplexities, arising from the semicolon and colon, you must take care not to abuse the dash. Go on with your commas, until you find that there is an evident insufficiency in the stop—then, and then only, bring in the dash. Might I venture upon anything like a general direction, I would say, that you are to use it where you were accustomed to think a colon necessary, for, having shown you that the comma now, in most instances, replaces the semicolon, perhaps it were best to keep that out of your mind entirely.

Avoid, most particularly, the use of the dash after the fashion of Sterne, Richardson, or such writers, whose talents may excuse, though not justify, the wildest deviations and fantasies. Consider the dash as what it really is, a stop or point of the most useful and comprehensive nature. If you make it serve every foolish conceit, or if you force it to mark every rhapsodical division that has no real existence, you lose its advantage as a stop. You will, then, be compelled to resort to the whole and half-colon, which, like Phaeton and the sun-horses, you will find too unmanageable for your feeble hand, and your composition will only draw laughter from the judicious.

A very good general direction might be, to confine yourself, except in details, or for marking a parenthesis, to one dash in a sentence. If you see occasion for more, always suspect long-windedness in the composition. Read over again what you have written, and you will generally discover, that you have either a redundancy of expression, or that you are forcing, into one sentence, the matter that should form another.

Having found after-pointing to be an excellent mode of learning punctuation, I cannot too strongly recommend it to your attention. Instead of putting the stops as you go on, write the whole sentence first, and then place them as you see occasion. By this, you will not only save time in thinking, but you will bring them in more fitly, and have less necessity for alterations. A continuance of this practice for a few months, will enable you to punctuate as you proceed, in the usual manner.

Particular Examination of Semicolon and Colon "Rules."

Whatever way I turn—whatever authorities I consult, the inconsistency of the colon and semicolon explanations is manifest. From what can be learned of the last mentioned stop, could any one expect to find in Mr. Murray's *comma* directions the two following examples?

No. 1. He feared want, hence, he over-valued riches.

No. 2. This conduct may heal the difference, nay, it may constantly prevent any in future.

If the semicolon *rules* can be at all understood, that stop ought to go after *want*, as it now stands. The comma would, indeed, be proper, if he said "*and hence*," for that makes a great alteration. This clearly shows the value of the dash, which always comes in readily, and with propriety, in cases of doubt or hiatus. If Mr. Murray's notions of punctuation were founded on tenable or fixed principles, he could not, for one moment, have hesitated about putting a semicolon after *want*, because, according to his own system, it is, evidently, the proper stop, though I think that the dash would more expressly mark the separation.

The same remarks apply to the second example. Particular force of opinion is intended by the *nay*. We are suddenly arrested to take a new and important consideration of a matter, and yet, instead of the more segregating half-colon, we find only a simple comma! Now, to show that I understand what I am talking about, I shall present the sentence in its proper *comma* form:—

This conduct may heal, nay, it may constantly prevent, any difference in future.

In this construction, the comma punctuation is unexceptionable, but in Mr. Murray's, either a semicolon or dash is, obviously, necessary after *difference*. The semicolon is, here, even more decided than in the first example, for a colon *might* answer after "want," but, in the present instance, it would, strange to say, appear much too strong! Where was Mr. Murray's,— at such an important time? Since he authorises the stopped dash, he might have made it work to support his comma illustration. However, my objections to Mr. Murray's pointing arise, chiefly, from its incompatibility with his semicolon rules. In explaining that stop, he says,

No. 3. Straws swim upon the surface; but pearls lie at the bottom.

This shows, very strikingly, the radical error of the old systems. No one, with clear views of the matter, could offer such an example. The sentence is, altogether, so brief, and the eye takes in the whole so quickly, that no mark but a comma after *surface*, could be either necessary or proper—none but a man who had a tincture of the time-reckoning plan in his head, would think of a semicolon. A gleam of light shot through Mr. Murray's imagination, when giving No. 2. He saw that the comma after *nay* must be so instantaneously seen by the reader, as to render no other stop necessary after *difference*, but he forgot how ill this accorded with his more cloudy conceptions of the semicolon.

That the dash has a certain character, far more valuable than the colon or semicolon, can be now seen. Without any discrepance or contrariety, it answers where those stops are questionable, while, at the same time, it marks the strongest

separations, with propriety and effect. Their most strenuous advocates will not, I think, object to the following :—

He feared want—hence, he over-valued riches.

This conduct may heal the difference—nay, it may constantly prevent any in future.

Originally we had only the *square* period and colon, and this last was used as a full stop, and the colon as a comma! But something beside this colon-comma was wanted to mark the more separable parts or members of a sentence, and the semicolon was invented, as far as I have observed, somewhere about 1500. I do not recollect to have met a comma earlier, and I am inclined to think that it was invented a little *after* the semicolon. The period was then transferred, as now, to the end of sentences, and the colon was assigned something like its present duty. This was pretty nearly the march of punctuation. There are cases where the comma is too weak and the colon too strong, and it was this chasm that suggested the semicolon. But it is to be understood, that I now mean the true and unmistakable stops, that is, the comma formed of a *round* dot with a curve at the bottom, and the semicolon by a dot over that. I am forced to be thus particular, because I know that ill-defined colons and periods are met with in old MSS., and in printed books of the fifteenth century, and that they may be, without sharp inspection, mistaken for commas and semicolons. This want is supplied by the semicolon, and had its use been confined there, punctuation would be, what it really is when not obscured by sophistry, extremely simple. Formerly, nothing was considered worthy of attention that was unaccompanied by difficulty—in other words, people delighted in everything that seemed mysterious, controversial, or hard to be attained. The semicolon was, accordingly, assigned stations for which it was naturally unsuited, and from this fallacious attempt arose all the misconceptions of punctuation that disgraced those times, and which have yet some influence at the present day. If Mr. Murray had confined himself to such examples as the following, no one of common sense could find fault with the semicolon :—

No. 4. Philosophers assert, that nature is unlimited in her operations; that she has inexhaustible treasures in reserve; that knowledge will always be progressive; and that all future generations will continue to make discoveries, of which we have not the least idea.

This, and sentences of a somewhat similar nature, will explain, at once, the functions of the semicolon. On any other occasion, its introduction will be generally found either unnecessary or injurious. I shall now speak decisively, or rather, I should say, without any reserve—*I dissent from all the other rules for the semicolon*. I do not admit the necessity, and I deny the propriety, of that stop, in the following examples, which I may say are all from Mr. Murray, because I find our later grammarians only copy, in substance, that gentleman's directions:—

No. 5. Experience teaches us, that an entire retreat from worldly affairs is not what religion requires; nor does it even enjoin a great retreat from them.

No. 6. As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to strife.

No. 7. As a roaring lion and a raging bear; so is a wicked ruler over the poor people.

No. 8. As the desire of approbation, when it works according to reason, improves the amiable part of our species in everything that is laudable; so nothing is more destructive to them, when it is governed by vanity and folly.

No. 9. Mercy and truth preserve the king; and his throne is upheld by mercy.

No. 10. He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man; he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich.

No. 11. Do not flatter yourself with the hope of perfect happiness; for there is no such thing in the world.

No. 12. Haughtiness is always repulsive; but vanity is mostly contemptible.

No. 13. We are constantly striving at wealth, and to obtain power over our fellow men, by means that are not always the most honourable; but such ambition can never bring peace of mind or true contentment.

The semicolons should be replaced by commas in all these examples, except the tenth, which requires either a colon or dash, as will appear from the colon *rules* themselves:—

No. 13. Do not flatter yourself with the hope of perfect happiness: there is no such thing in the world.

What difference is there between this, and No. 10, to authorise a semicolon after *man*? The reason assigned for the semicolon in the eleventh example is, because the conjunction *for* is expressed, and yet the same stop is put where there

is neither *and*, nor any other *divisional* conjunction whatever! I am almost tired of noticing such coarse incongruities—yet I cannot let the following pass, because it is a particular example of a compound sentence :—

No. 15. Virtue refines the affections, but vice debases them.

Compare this with No. 12, which is a most remarkable and never-omitted semicolon rule amongst our punctuative instructors, and is it not evident that, while the *practice* of such writers is so constantly at variance with their own *directions*, their pupils can learn nothing as a secure guidance to the knowledge of punctuation ?

Period.

This, now generally called a full point, is only used to denote the conclusion of a sentence, and to mark an abbreviation. In this latter case, it does not exclude the stop that each member may demand. We can write, for I do not advise it, *the Dr. did not see his patient to-day*, because the period here is no stop, but in the following a comma is necessary, *I sent for the Dr., but he did not come*. However, should a sentence finish with an abbreviation, there is no necessity for a second period, as, *I distinctly say, that I always address him Esq., and not Mr.*

This punctuating of periods is only a few years in use, but it is seldom any real advantage. Abbreviations should be avoided as much as possible, because they have a slovenly effect, and sometimes cause misunderstandings and errors. With personal titles they are the most allowable, but, unless immediately connected with a name, curtailment is scarcely defensible. You may write Gen. Col. or Cap. Jones, but to shorten these on other occasions, as *the Gen. Col. or Cap. did not come to-day*, has a curious appearance. As well might we justify this, *So far from being a gen. he was not fit to be a col., or even a cap.* Abbreviations are latterly avoided by respectable writers. Even the *i.e.*, the *éc.*, marks of brevity, and such are gradually disappearing.

Notes of Interrogation and Admiration.

Of those two stops, I am satisfied with the usual explanations in the grammars, and I shall not make many remarks. The Spaniards are not contented with placing them at the end, but they must have them also at the beginning :—

¿ De quien es esta casa ?
Whose is this house ?
 ¡ Buen raciocinio !
Fine reasoning !

I think that I see you laughing at this, but it is not fair except you laugh also at our stopped dashes, for the double points of the Spaniard are not so preposterous. He gives at least an intelligible reason—that they are put at the beginning of questions and exclamations, to prepare the reader for taking the proper tone of voice, but your stopped dasher does not, because he cannot, explain why he throws his,—;—:— into the body of a sentence. You must conceive what he means—the thing is too intellectually delicate for description !

I must make another remark. Some parenthesise a note of admiration, as thus :—

This author further asserts, that Voltaire was proud, ignorant (!) and passionate.

The meaning intended to be conveyed is, that whatever truth or falsehood might be in the first and last charges, none but a stupid driveller would accuse Voltaire of being “ignorant,” but were that word put in italics, the object would be equally well answered. As to using two or three notes of admiration to signify double or treble surprise, I shall leave that to your own discretion.

The note of interrogation is also, like the admiration, sometimes parenthesised, as, “ Our last accounts state, that Mr. Williams, the Governor (?) of the island, had not arrived.” Here it insinuates that Mr. Williams is not the governor, and wherever either of those two stops are placed in this manner, they throw a doubt on the correctness of the preceding word. When a man reads for others he should announce their introduction, for the satisfaction of his hearers. Sometimes when a question is asked to which no

answer is expected, the note of admiration is used, as in the following instance :—

Is it because botany is one of the sciences which demands the smallest range of intellect, that the French have made themselves more conspicuous in it than in most others—and may absolutely claim a superiority over England!—*Ed. Rev.* vol. 34, page 395.

Capitals.

I introduce this subject because it is connected with punctuation, though I have nothing new to say, for every necessary direction is fully explained in the grammars. I cannot, however, help remarking, that here we are much better off than our forefathers. They were compelled to put a capital letter to every substantive, and that, though simple to a grammarian, gave others great trouble. Now, we are obliged only to put a capital at the commencement of a sentence, the names of God, of men and women, and of countries and towns—the pronoun I, and the interjection O, and at every new line in poetry. Besides, we have a discretionary power to put capitals to such words as we may wish to particularly distinguish.

This is as it should be. Yet what an important revolution it produced in that department of literature! So important, indeed, that it makes me hope to see punctuation rendered equally simple.

Notice of Criticisms.

Having now developed, what I consider, a rational and easy mode to obviate the difficulties of punctuation, I must notice the objections that it has called forth. While the public press has given my work, generally, even more praise than I could reasonably expect, it has, I believe without an exception, disapproved of my suggestions on the dash. As I view those objections in a friendly light, so I hope that my explanations will be received with a corresponding good feeling and temper.

The dash appears to be the ground of complaint, on the presumption that it would be the constant resource of slovenly writers, and reduce composition to an unsightly mass of

words and strokes. Perhaps it might, for where is there a liberty given that is not abused by the careless or stupid? But this is quite opposed to my directions, which strictly enjoin a very sparing use of the dash, and also previously where I condemn, in the strongest terms, its combination with other stops. If it be still objected, that my recommendations for its general adoption in the place of the colons and semicolons would inevitably lead to an unmeasured abuse, I offer this work as an answer. I ask does it show any extraordinary or remarkable number of dashes? Nay, I ask, are there more than may be found in books, where the prohibited stops also abound? I give my own example, and if that will not do, why then example is unavailing. What more can any one do, than to offer sound proofs of what he proposes to teach? and since no one has said that my writing is disfigured by constant dashes, or that it is not, generally, very readily comprehended, there can, surely, be no danger in permitting the learner to follow my plan.

Some oppose the dash according to my "theory," chiefly because it would become the resource of indolent or inexperienced writers, though they have no objection to its occasional use.

It appears to be forgotten that my object is to instruct persons of humble information or requirements, and that I have distinctly said that the dash, or in other words my system, is unnecessary for those who understand the proper use of the colon and semicolon. This makes it appear plain, that my darling object was not the total abrogation or expulsion of those stops, and, having explicitly mentioned it once, that was enough for my purpose. I could not be constantly alluding to it, when urging their rejection, but I think it will be admitted that their gradual decline is not a proof of our retrograding in composition. Fifty persons now write passably for one formerly, when every sentence was copiously strewed with these points.

No explanations of the colon and semicolon that have yet appeared, can serve as a guide for their use. With the exception of compositors, who learn punctuation like a trade, very few have a just conception of their proper stations, for

gentlemen of liberal education but rarely exhibit true knowledge of the subject. This is plainly seen in their writings, wherein they often drag those officious stops most unnecessarily and unmeaningly, merely, as it would seem, to show that they are not ignorant of what every spelling-book professes to teach.

Concluding Observations.

This essay on punctuation has extended much beyond the length that I originally intended. But, as I proceeded, its importance grew apace, and I found myself compelled to enlarge my prescribed limits. Let it not, however, be supposed, that I wish to make it an art reducible to fixed and certain rules, for, in whatever way I may have expressed my thoughts, they are of quite a contrary tendency. Without permitting an unmeaning, uncontrolled, or dangerous liberty, I have endeavoured to show, that a man of middling capacity may, with a very small share of judgment, acquire a knowledge of punctuation, equal to all the purposes of ordinary composition. It was unknown to the ancients, whose writings are the standards of correctness and energy. Some will not believe this, although they have the Hebrew without vowels, as a proof that we can dispense with things which, when known, appear to be indispensable. But vowels are a great aid to written language, and so is punctuation. All such improvements should, therefore, be cherished, because they widen the road to literary knowledge, and enable the bulk of the people to travel easily, where only the studious few used to pick their steps with difficulty.

The very nature of Greek and Latin, where the sense was chiefly found by terminations, did not require the assistance of punctuation so much as our modern pronoun and preposition tongues, and the ancients, therefore, dispensed with its use, for we have proofs that the thing occurred to them. In the British Museum, on the Townley and other marbles, we sometimes see a rude *punch* of the graver between words, but neither Greeks nor Romans had any taste whatever either in that, or in the formation or arrangement of letters. Their inscriptions were positively barbarous, for their lines on a

pannel were never central, and their letters are commonly of different sizes even in the same word! A village tombstone engraver would now be ashamed to put out of his hands such miserable specimens as appeared on their best works.

But, after the fall of Roman power, the puny construction of less polished languages required some divisional marks, and accordingly we find, in manuscript works, written centuries before printing, a rude attempt at separation, not simply of sentences, but even of members. The invention of printing did, certainly, suggest the necessity of something like system, and, in about half a century after, punctuation aspired to a settled regularity of plan. Here are three centuries and a half of experience, and yet, after all the laws that have been solemnly laid down, no two authors of eminence punctuate alike, or even according to the same plan throughout! Nay, they are, always, at variance with themselves, for where can the work of any length be found, in which an undeviating system of pointing is steadily and invariably maintained? Since fixed laws cannot be framed, nothing can be expected beyond general principles.

I may be censured—perhaps I may be laughed at, for having said so much against the colon and semicolon. But, when I find them to be the primeval sources of unprofitable contention—when I find that they embarrass rather than assist—when I find their functions not decisively but hypothetically assigned, and, above all, when I find that the wisest heads cannot keep them under wholesome subjection, am I not justified in substituting the more amenable and conclusive dash, for such blustering disturbers? Did the veriest pedant in punctuation ever raise a dispute worth notice, about the period, or the notes of interrogation and exclamation? Even the use of the comma, which so often occurs, is very easily learned, although Mr. Murray has obliged us with no fewer than twenty rules for its government. I have, therefore, come to this conclusion as a general principle, that the punctuation of the parts or members of sentences, can be accomplished, with propriety and effect, by the comma and dash only. This conclusion I have proved, and I disclaim the word *theory* as connected with my plan.

CHAPTER VIII.

SOME GENERAL DIRECTIONS RESPECTING COMPOSITION.

I do not intend this as a recapitulation, and you must refer to the previous chapters, for various directions, which will not be noticed here. What follow, are only such as have, since, presented themselves to my recollection.

If you wish to rise above the lowest class of writers, you must be very frugal of superlatives and strong expressions. Common writers abound in *horrible, shocking, terrible, uncommon, most extraordinary, unparalleled, most unwarrantably, tremendous, dreadful, most outrageous, shameful, scandalous, most unpardonable, atrocious*, and such words of great force. They think that this imparts peculiar energy to their descriptions, but, while they waste their strength on trifles, they are left without expressions of sufficient weight for the more important parts, and they are well off if they cannot be charged with falsehood, as well as with ignorance.

Such persons cannot tell us, that a man wantonly kicked a dog, without talking of *unparalleled* cruelty. Now look in your dictionary, and you will find that this amounts to saying, that the cruelty was greater than was ever before known in the world. Do not say, when you meet a very neat man unshaven, or with dirty shoes, that he looked *shocking*, or that you were *shocked*. You will find that you were only, at the most, surprised, but if you saw him in rags, you might be shocked. If a man talk more than he ought, though he much annoy the company, say his behaviour was rude, or highly improper, unless he spoke obscenely, and then you may be justified in calling it *scandalous*.

I am the more particular on this matter, because it is of the highest importance. People in distinguished life, though their literary knowledge may be humble enough, generally learn, by experience, the value of words, and the consequences that may attach to unjustifiable superlatives, or unwarrantably strong descriptions. Hence, their letters are more moderate in expression, and more cautiously worded, than those of the inferior ranks. Kings or ministers will not talk of *gross*

violations, or *unheard-of* aggressions, unless they are prepared for war.

As I think that you now understand what I mean, I shall sum up this part of my instructions by advising you to study, sedulously, a moderation and temperance in your words. Strong expressions upon every occasion, will not only show your literary ignorance, and your unacquaintance with well-regulated life, but they may involve you in serious troubles, and even in legal prosecutions. If you describe a very barbarous murder, your feelings may excuse words of exaggerated import, but you will, generally, find it the most safe and prudent, and the most charitable and christian-like, plan, to use the more mild and less acrid expressions. When you write on an indifferent subject, you can only offend against the symmetrical rules of language, but where individuals are concerned, the case is different. Remember, that he who is affected well considers the force of your words. The most ignorant peasant will do this, if you use extra harsh expressions. If you, as an agent, complain to his master, that he was extremely culpable in coming for the commands, at six, instead of five, in the morning, he will not overlook "extremely," and will tell you, "I owns I do wrong, but I don't think, howsoever, you ought to have said 'twas *extremely* bad, for the most watchfullest might oversleep oneself."

On the other hand, you must be equally guarded. If, upon every petty occasion, strong words are reprehensible in one way, they are disgusting in another. Unpractised writers deal out praise with shameless profusion, and thus make themselves the sport of the more sensible and discerning. They give us abundance of *most judicious, most kind, excessively humane, uncommonly good, kind-hearted, quintessence of perfection, elegant, beautiful, mild, sweet, charming, fine*, and everything that can mark encomium high. This propensity betrays its folly in conversation also, for with those indiscriminate praisers, a girl is beautiful, and so is boiled mutton at dinner—soup is elegant, a pig's face is charming, and a cod's head delightful. Let me entreat that you be moderate and regulated in your words. Such grotesque

efforts to eulogise are but a pantomime for men of education, and plain people regard them as only *palaver*.

Crabbe's "Synonymes" will give you important information upon the proper signification and use of words. But you must read his book without any alarm about the difficulty of always observing his rules, for no man can do that. By occasional reference, you will derive valuable instruction, but it is not from seeing a shade of difference between such words as *amusing* and *entertaining*. Look to *learn* and *teach*, and *lie* and *lay*, which you so often confound, and such others as you may suspect that you misconceive or misapply.

Never multiply negatives needlessly, as in this instance :—

Having gone so far in their daring course, the robbers did not think it safe not to proceed farther.—*Fam. Lib., Hist. of the Jews*, vol. ii. page 368.

Better thus, "the robbers thought it unsafe not to proceed farther." Yet this is a very simple example compared to what one sometimes meets, where it is necessary to pause, in order to ascertain whether the writer means an affirmation or negation. Some authors think that such puzzling composition shows their skill, but their readers look on it as silliness.

Avoid jingling. This is a great blemish, and should be carefully eschewed. It is disagreeable to the reader, and it implies either negligence or ignorance in the writer, either of which charges are unpleasant. Suppose I wrote *disagreeable* instead of *unpleasant*, or *avoided* instead of *eschewed*, you would immediately perceive something displeasing to the ear, on account of the proximity of similar words. But this requires no little caution. Never work yourself up to anything like a horror of this kind of jingling—if you do, you will, inevitably, fall into gross errors and false representations. Should you be at a loss for a second word of nearly equal signification, set down the first again, without hesitation, for sound or appearance is nothing in comparison to accuracy. In Mr. Locke's "Essay on Human Understanding," he mentions *ideas* perhaps a thousand times, yet, amongst all the celebrated men who combated his doctrines, did any ever dream of charging this as a fault?

However, you should not say, *I cannot describe his humorous*

style of description, nor, It now only remains for me, to notice the remainder of your letter, nor, I dreamed a dream, nor, at that hour, our friends departed. There are times, places, and allowances, for all things. On business you may write, *I received your receipt.* You could not be directly censured for saying, *Though, as a brave man, I admired his manly conduct, yet it was a little too fierce.* The word *manly*, immediately giving the idea of *courageous*, does not seem to play upon *man*, but still we feel that there is a certain inelegance in the sentence.

Jingling is not, strictly speaking, what I have described. It is the use of words that rhyme to each other, which is a capital defect in prose, and I have only employed the term for my own convenience, to bring the two faults under one denomination.

You must take care not to couch your expressions in this way. *He was very rigid in his commands, though he gave them in rather a frigid manner.* The ear is offended with *rigid* and *frigid*—the last should be replaced by *cold*. If you find yourself compelled to use jinglers, remove them as far as possible asunder. Nor must you imagine, that those rhymers which sound alike, though differently spelled and applied, are excusable—they are the worst of all, because they pun and jingle, at the same time. *John being bred up to no trade whatever found himself, at his father and mother's death, totally unable to earn his bread.* Here, notwithstanding the distance between *bred* and *bread*, we are more displeased than if the meaning of both were alike, because there seems to be an affectation, however undesigned, of sorry punning. It is like saying, *The Knight went out on a cold night, or, He seized his prey and then he went to pray.* All those kinds of jingling can, by ordinary attention, be easily escaped, and you must shun them, if you wish to be above the herd of grovelling writers.

The grand object, and indeed the perfection of writing is, to make it quite clear to the reader, without giving him any unnecessary trouble. With this view, avoid *the former*, or *the latter*, for, if they do not compel him to look back, his hearers, who have not the book, are always in an uncertainty

by those dissatisfactory expressions. Doctor Johnson had a particular aversion to them, and his opinion ought to carry weight, if mine have none. I just now read in an old Irish paper, "Saturday sennight W. B——, Esq., of Lisnakill, was fired at by an assassin, while the former gentleman was writing at his window. The ball grazed his head." So then the assassin was a gentleman too! You see what comes from affecting to write neat.

For the same reason, avoid *this* and *that*, in the way which shall be presently explained. Many writers, and some of eminence too, are very fond of using those words, precisely for the same purpose as *the former* and *the latter*, but they are much more objectionable. For, if *the former* and *the latter* give us some trouble, they, at least, occasion no doubt when time is not an object, because they cannot, by the most ignorant, be wrongly applied—they always mean, the first and the last person or thing previously mentioned. But *this* and *that* are by no means so positive. Though the "rule" is, that *this* relates to the last or nearest, and *that* to the first or farthest, yet all writers do not observe this law, and I have, often, been completely at a stand to guess what was actually meant, when the context was not sufficiently obvious.

Desirous of knowing what Mr. Murray says on this point, I found it, after a long hunt, in his "Grammar," for he mentions nothing of it in his "Dissertation on Composition," where I naturally looked for an observation:—

This indicates the latter or last mentioned; *that*, the former or first mentioned: as, "Both wealth and poverty are temptations; that, tends to excite pride, this, discontent."

Now, we often see *this* first and *that* next, and so the quotation would then read or imply, *poverty tends to excite discontent, wealth, pride*, instead of *wealth tends to excite pride, poverty, discontent*, as it now does. To what childish foolery we descend, in attempting refinement upon stubborn plainness! As well might we think of keeping high roads like the walks in a pleasure-ground.

Why not repeat the words *pride*, and *poverty*? I am no advocate for avoidable repetitions, but, here, I think they would have peculiar beauty and energy. But, if there be an

objection, *the first* and *the other* would be substitutes, much more clear, and certainly as elegant.

Here and *there* are equally objectionable. Who is obliged to keep whimsical rules in his head, that have nothing to do with grammar, and serve only to retard that clearness of comprehension, which is the grand object of composition? You will see, in this example, what I mean by those *heres* and *theres* :—

Bacon and Locke were two very great men, and their principal works, the “*Organon*,” and the “*Human Understanding*,” evince the most profound knowledge : *here*, we see philosophy teaching us the real power of our conceptions ; *there*, the means by which such information can be developed.

I may now, indeed, fairly ask you, which is which? You will, probably take the *here* for *the former*, and the *there* for *the latter*, but you must now reverse their places, if you want to come at the sense, for it seems that they come under the same “rule” as *this* and *that*. As I hope that it is unnecessary to expend any more time on those absurdities, I shall proceed to examine the third, for there is yet one more.

Down to the very present day, our grammarians are praising extravagantly, as a most happy instance of energetic and beautiful composition, the passage in Pope’s preface to his *Homer*, which commences thus :—

Homer was the greater genius ; Virgil the better artist : in the one, we most admire the man ; in the other, the work.

Now this is more ridiculous by far than the two already noticed. There is, here, not even anything like a gleam of sense for a guide. We may *suppose* the things farthest to be *that* and *there*, but *the one* has no visible or possible right—no claim direct or indirect, to the place assigned it by our worthy bye-law makers. Virgil may be *the one* as well as Homer, and Homer *the other*. See how ill this accords with their rules for the other anomalies. If *this* and *that* mean the nearest, we would naturally think that *the one* should imply the same sense, but, if its distant character be justified, because we usually say *one* and *the other*, when speaking of two things, then, here is my answer :—

Smith and Jones were constantly fighting, but Jones being the stronger, generally beat the other.

There is a sentence, the import of which cannot be mistaken, nor can the construction be censured, and yet *the other* is Smith, who is first. Shall we be told that the definite article *the* gives this extraordinary power to *one*, of fixing it as the farthest? Ah! gentlemen grammarians, it is vain to defend anomalies or absurdities, especially when they render sense obscure or doubtful. You will now find that in defending *the one*, you do but evince ignorance of the distinction between the cardinal and ordinal numbers, and that, according to your principle, we might say *the one* and *the two*, instead of *the one* and *the other*.

I have been obliged to dwell longer on this subject than may be pleasing to those for whom my book is written. The subject is, however, of no minor importance. Since the vulgarity, or rather the commonness, of *the former* and *the latter* has been exposed by Dr. Johnson, our grammarians and fine writers studiously avoid, and loudly condemn, those expressions. But, because the Doctor used *the one* and *the other*, and its two worthy companions, and because no one had, hitherto, pointed out their impropriety, they still continue them. A notable proof, truly, of their sagacity and good taste. Now, I assert

First. That *the one* and *the other* are sheer nonsense.

Secondly. That *here* and *there* and *this* and *that*, not being intelligible without knowing an unauthorised convention that is not, in any way, connected with grammar, are absurd and ridiculous—absurd, because they are obscure—ridiculous, because they are pure inventions of pedantry that supply no want in our language.

Thirdly. That *the former* and *the latter*, however they may show a writer's inability for more agreeable description, are intelligible to every one, and must, therefore, be preferable to any expressions that are not universally and naturally comprehensible.

Therefore, if you cannot proceed without this dissatisfactory mode of explanation, say *the former* and *the latter*, *the first* and *the other*, *in the first*, and *in the next*, but NEVER *the one* and *the other*, nor *this* and *that*, nor *here* and *there*.

I shall prevent, by anticipation, a mere cavilling objection

that may be made. Where there is no distinction understood, *one*, not *the one*, and *the other* are allowable :—

Of those two horses that you sent me, I shall find it difficult to make a choice, for one does not appear to be better than the other.

John and Tom are like twins—I never can distinguish one from the other. So, we may use *here and there* conjoined, as, “We find, here and there, some errors,” because this is only saying, that *there are errors occasionally found*—but surely, I need not waste your time in noticing such special pleading exceptions.

The admirers of those turns ought to be obliged to me for the following, which I offer them as a beautiful concentration of their favourites—it is, indeed, a height of sublimity in composition which I thought I could not ascend, but no one knows what he can do until he tries his powers. I have punctuated it according to the rules of those who write such sentences :—

Tom and John evinced widely different dispositions. Tom loved his book ; John idle sports ; the one, was a treasure in the family ; the other a nuisance : that, was amiable ; this, distressing : here we are repulsed by irreligion and disobedience ; there, cheered by piety and filial duty : the former, promoted his own fortune ; the latter, his ruin : in fine, the first was honoured in life and death ; the other, despised in both.

Think well, now, on all that I have said respecting prolixity and long-windedness. Remember that pointed anecdote so well known, of one who, in correspondence with his friend, began, “I have not time to write a short letter, and must, therefore, trouble you with a long one.” The meaning is, that it is harder to put our thoughts into a small, than a large, space. Any blockhead capable of forming letters, can cover a sheet of paper, in detailing what might be reduced to a few lines.

Observe, I say again, to mark all your sentences with a period at the end, and to commence them by a capital letter. To this you must pay particular attention, if you wish your writing to be understood without difficulty. The finest penmanship will, otherwise, avail but little.

CHAPTER IX.

DIRECTIONS TO WRITE FOR PRINTERS.

You must not cover both sides of the paper, as in ordinary correspondence. It is very troublesome to the compositor, and will prove disadvantageous to yourself. For, if you write to a newspaper or other periodical, where payment is not required, this alone may cause the rejection of your communication, and, in case of publishing a work, it will considerably increase your expense.

Cut the paper into slips of any convenient size—say that of an octavo or quarto volume. Write on one side only, and number each at the bottom. You may, afterwards, connect them with a string, either at the top or sides, as may best suit your purpose.

If you think, notwithstanding all my explanations, that you cannot depend on your own punctuation, you will act wisely in not insisting on its being followed. Leave that to the compositor, and he will correct your errors, and preserve more consistency and uniformity throughout. But you must observe my directions, to commence each sentence with a capital letter, and finish with a period—otherwise your manuscript will be called “bad copy,” and there will be an extra charge for loss of time, just the same as for bad hand-writing.

Unless you spell very accurately, leave the orthography, also, to the compositor.

Write all the terms of trade or science, proper names, foreign words, or those not in common use, particularly plain, by which you will escape some vexation, and extra charges for correction. Observe, in such cases, to make every *l* and *t* very plain, and that it shall not appear doubtful if an *n* be a *u*, or a *w* an *m*. Though you may hear to the contrary, give me leave to tell you, that our compositors are only obliged to know plain English. If, for civil, I write *civit*, for always, *atways*, for author, *anther*, for common, *commou*—these they will spell right, but they are not supposed to know scarce or unusual, technical or foreign, words.

Draw one line underneath every word that you intend for

italics—two lines for small, and three for large, capitals. But be very sparing of their use. Keep in mind, that they are like superlatives, whose force will weaken in proportion to their frequency.

If you wish to make two or more paragraphs out of one that you think too long, place, at the end of the sentence where you wish the division, two crotchets, back to back, thus,] [. All printers know this mark so well, that they will make the new paragraph, without any other explanation or direction.

Avoid notes at the bottom of pages, though they are used by men of the greatest erudition. While they enhance the printing expenses, they are always irksome to the reader, because they unseasonably distract his attention. If explanations, not suited to the body of the work, occur, reserve them for the end, where you may put them altogether, and without extra charge. For observe, that nothing which is absolutely necessary, ought to be put in notes. They should be rather of a satisfactory than of an indispensable nature. Some writers carry this noting to a ridiculous extent, as, An author of eminence * says—and then we look down and see * NEWTON at the bottom like a fallen star. Since the name is given, no reader can conceive, why it should not be inserted after *eminence*. I have often wished that printers would charge so high for such aberrations, that none but men of fortune could meddle with them. We should, then, but rarely see single names standing at the foot of a page, or that intolerable nuisance, more notes than text.

I must again draw your attention to the necessity of writing plain. There would be no occasion to say a word on this point, if you knew as well as I do, the torments that gentlemen inflict on themselves by their wretched scrawls. They can have nothing to do with a printing office, without complaints of errors, which often make them ridiculous, and give them great vexation. But I know that, so far from this being the fault of the compositors, they take more pains than they ought, to decipher such hen-scratching writing. Though practice enables them to *guess* out bad manuscript with a more than ordinary readiness, they may be often seen

handing about, from one to another, the illegible stuff of a peerless peer or an M.P., in the hope that, by chance, one might light upon the meaning of some word that defied interpretation by the context. Yet some of those dignified scribblers will affect a knowledge of punctuation too, and will bluster and prate about their senseless stops not being followed, although the compositor altered them only through ill-bestowed compassion for the *writer*, or lest ignorance might be imputed to himself. They will also, forsooth, introduce foreign scraps into their unintelligible English, but, for this, the compositor has a help in books wherein the usual quotations of empty-headed linguists are ready cut and dry in alphabetical order, and, if he can only make out the first word or two, he is almost sure of finding them in the list.

Of all foolborn notions of high-breeding, illegible writing is the most ludicrous. We may write a perfectly genteel and plain hand, without the formal cut of the clerk or schoolmaster, but, whatever we may do in private concerns or correspondence, we should not make laughing-stocks or merry-andrews of ourselves, by going to the printing office with our *gentlemanly* scrawls.

Surround with a line every thing that you do not intend to be printed. For want of this necessary precaution, strange observations sometimes appear that much annoy the writer. It is folly to talk of "the *stupidity* of the printer." Omissions are serious matters in his business, and he does it well if he leaves out nothing that might, by possibility, be designed for insertion. You may be certain, however, that he will not meddle with any encircled words, further than to read them for his direction.

Lastly, if you desire your name to appear, you may sign it in your customary manner, but write it a second time, very plain, to spare the compositor any trouble in giving you a new baptism. It is no part of his business to decipher hieroglyphics.

I shall now let you into a little of the technicalities of printing, as I am sure that such information will be acceptable.

Compositors are those who arrange the types. Their work is called composing or *setting*, and whatever they set from, whether print or manuscript, is named *copy*. When finished, *pressmen*, not printers as they are commonly called, transmit the impression to paper, by a mechanical process not necessary to be described. A *printer* is, properly speaking, he who superintends or undertakes the entire management, and this is the reason that the word is often applied in a very extensive sense—every fault or excellency is said to be the printer's. As the best compositors are liable to make errors in setting, a printed *proof* of their work is furnished to the *reader*, commonly called "corrector of the press," who carefully compares it with the *copy*, which is slowly read aloud by a *reading-boy*, and notes any errors that occur. The corrected proof is sent back to the compositor, who rectifies the faults marked, but, where time permits, the reader generally requires a *revise*, or second proof, for his further security. The types, when arranged, are called *matter*, and when properly secured by an iron frame or *chase*, the whole is then a *form*. A *publisher*, who was formerly called "*The bookseller*," is the person who gives out or sells, any newly printed work, either to the trade or the public. An editor of a newspaper or periodical work is at the head of the literary department, and, as he is supposed to know the feelings of the proprietor, he writes, rejects, and alters what he pleases—the editor of a book is one who undertakes the revision of another's work, and makes either additions, abridgments, or changes that he always calls improvements.

CHAPTER X.

ENGLISH CONJUGATORS.

PREPARATORY to entering on this subject, I must exhibit a table of the persons, to save myself some trouble in the subsequent explanations, and enable you to understand them the better:—

SINGULAR. The first person, or personal pronoun is *I*, the second, *thou*, the third, *he*, *she*, or *it* when speaking of irrational creatures. It has other applications also, for which see the Grammars.

PLURAL. The first person, or personal pronoun is *we*, the second *you*, the third *they*.

For our present purpose, it is not necessary to make any remark on this table, except that the second person singular *thou* being, for a long time past, almost confined to the Bible, books of prayer, poetry, and the Quakers, it is no use for ordinary writing, and is superseded by *you*, which may be considered as the second person in both singular and plural. Accordingly, when I speak of the second person singular, it must be understood as *you* and not *thou*, and as it will be often convenient to mention the *persons*, you are to understand that the *first persons* mean *I* and *we*, the second *you*, and the third, *he*, *she*, *it*, and *they*.

We may now begin at once with *shall* and *will*. Their origin being of no importance to you, it will suffice to observe, that they are the roots of their derivatives *should* and *would*, and by remembering this, you may often avoid misapplications. You must know, on a little reflection, that, in the first persons, *shall* implies something of doubt or uncertainty, and that *will* is quite positive and determined through all the persons. Keep this in view, at least as a general consideration, and you will the more easily understand such exceptions, as custom or error may have introduced or sanctioned.

When, in London, you say, I shall go to Amsterdam next week, that is proper, because, though you are determined to go there, the distance, and the casualties of land and sea travelling, are presented. It seems too much to say *will*, and you therefore use the less presumptuous *shall*. By this you mean, in effect, *God willing*, as our more pious grandfathers were accustomed to say on those occasions. But, if in Fleet Street, you mean to go to the Strand, you say *will*, because, though we know that you might, in the instant, drop dead or be killed, we cannot, always, be keeping minute contingencies in view. Accordingly you say, I *shall* go to Amsterdam, and, I'll go to the Strand—for, observe that 'll and 'd, are contractions of *will* and *would*, and not of *shall* and *should*.

Now, after considering this, pray tell me what you mean

by *I think I shall*, which you, and learned men likewise, so often say? Is it not a kind of double doubting—something like, *I think of thinking*? Does it not, now appear to you more correct to say, *I think I will*?

I must discuss this further. Exceptions may be taken where dying, drowning, falling, and such like, are concerned. On those occasions, *I will* is repugnant, merely because not habitual to an English ear, and I know it will be urged that we should say, *I think I shall die of this disorder*, and that *will* would not be right. Now I contend for the contrary. What is this *think* but a qualification of *shall*—a word already confessedly doubtful and inconclusive? True it is, that one may say, *I am now beginning to doubt of my former doubting*, though no man, who had any taste at all for composition, would so express himself. But while I admit it for the advantage of my opponents, I deny that, in the present instance, it is any support to *shall*. That I believe I must die of a certain disorder with which I am afflicted, is the intended meaning, but *I shall die* is the very same thing, without *I think*. *Will* is decisive, but only as far as human power can go, for something might prevent us from doing the most simple act of positive determination. *Will* is, therefore, obviously of a qualificatory nature or condition, but *shall* is not, and, upon this, I support my assertion, that in all such expressions as I think, I believe, I fear, that I shall die, *shall* ought, in strictness, to be replaced by *will*.

If my personal safety be in danger, and that I cry out, Oh! assist me! I'll be killed, I'll be drowned, I'll fall, we all know that, in English, these are blunders, implying the reverse of what is intended—we call for aid, and then we stop it by adding, that it is useless. But, Oh! assist me! I fear I'll be drowned, is a proper expression.

Some maintain that *shall* and *will* are a kind of *shibboleth*, the proper use of which must be acquired from infancy, and that their management is beyond ordinary explanation. Anomalies ours has, as well as all other languages, and to contend against them, while they are understood and sanctioned by general usage, would be equally foolish as to oppose idiomatical construction. But grammar recognises no shibboleths.

The proper use of the words in question is as clearly definable as *to have* or *to be*, but, at present, I can do little more than offer a few passing observations, merely for the purpose of relieving the young writer from those doubts with which, I know, he is embarrassed when he takes up his pen, and for encouraging him to proceed with the greater confidence. That my desire is not for impertinent innovation, my own writing proves, for, in compliance with general custom, I commonly use *shall* where I am satisfied that, in strict propriety, it should be *will*. My object is only to show, that, by erroneous substitution of one for another, such conjugating words are, sometimes, improperly used, and that occasions occur where they are so obviously synonymous, as to render choice a matter of perfect indifference. I only desire that the plain truth should be told, without "mental reservation," in order to confound the pretenders to mystery, but it would seem that this is not agreeable to our metaphysical grammarians. However freely I may have given my opinion upon *I think I shall*, I must not be understood as wishing to press its exclusion. I only pointed it out as a misuse of *shall*, and I leave time to work a reformation. All notices of long-unobserved grammatical misconstructions are, at first, annoying, and do breed strife, but, when anger subsides, they are dispassionately examined, and the *discoverer* is treated with courtesy, as I shall be hereafter.

You see that you are constantly infringing what you suppose are rules, that none but an Englishman can understand or conceive. You say *will* now, upon the very same occasion that you said *shall* only a few minutes before. You do not always, when in Fleet Street, say *I'll* go the Strand—sometimes you say *I shall*. For this, I shall not, however, quarrel with you, but it is right to remind you that, by this vague usage, you admit *shall* to have no particular character in the first persons. In like manner, he whose authority you dare not question—one to whom you are all submission, desires you to do something, and you answer, *I shall*, when you mean to say, *I will*, or, that you are so determined upon doing the thing required, that he may be certain of its being done. So a minister of state answers the king's com-

mand by *I shall*, when the obsequious crown servant means to say, Your majesty may consider it as done. He might, indeed, with propriety, though perhaps not so respectfully, say, *it shall be done*, because that pledges him for the performance of the royal order, either by himself or by others.

When asked a question that seems unnecessary, you frequently answer by a *will* and a *shall*, as, "Will you prosecute John?" "Will I! aye, and that I *shall*." Thus, while you mean to give the strongest possible assurance of your resolution to prosecute John, the true sense of your answer is, "I am so unalterably determined to prosecute John, that I am amazed at your question, yet I am not quite determined to prosecute him." The answer should be, Will I! aye, and that I *will*.

Should, *would*, and *ought*, have frequently the same meaning, according to peculiarity of position, or other circumstances. The following sentence will exemplify a good deal:—

I should have gone to Spain, but my father would not consent.

We all know, and will take it for granted, that the meaning is, I designed, or intended, to go to Spain, but my father refused his consent to my going thither.

Now, in this case, we may say, indifferently, I *would*, or I *should*, but you generally take *should*, because it is more popular, and indeed the repetition of *would* is not agreeable to the ear. But, if an emphasis be laid on *should*, it has then, precisely, the same signification as *ought*. While we thus see, that *would*, *should*, or *ought*, do not very materially alter the sense of the first member, it is worthy of remark, that we cannot put *should* or *ought*, in place of the *would* after *father*, without entirely changing the direct and positive meaning. Observe this well, because it shows you the folly of attempting to give fixed significations to those very important words. You see that there are times, places, and circumstances, for their particular meanings, notwithstanding all we are told to the contrary. However, to satisfy those who wish to go into minutiae, I shall exhibit the different significations, as regard the first member of the sentence in question:—

I would—I had determined to go
I should—I intended to go
I should, with emphasis—I ought to have gone
I ought—My duty was, to have gone.

We say, indifferently, *should*, or *would* you like to see Spain? and you may answer I would, or I should, for either signifies *yes*, and if you add *not*, both mean *no*. But you generally say *should*, for no reason whatever, except the same partiality that you evince for *shall*. Were it worth investigation, however, *would* appears to have the preference, in the simple interrogative sentence, though if something conditional follow, *should* seems better, as, "Should you like to see Spain if you could afford the expense?" But such considerations are only mere quibbling of grammatical pedantry, nor should I lose one moment upon them, were it not for the purpose of proving to you, that there are circumstances where those words are alike as to effect and meaning. This is always important when you come to write, in order that you may disregard the ill-contrived, though imposing, schemes of some grammar-manufacturers, to fix an invariable or exclusive sense for such words.

There is, as simple sentences, no difference whatever between You *should* not walk, and You *ought* not to walk, nor yet between *Should* you walk? and *Ought* you to walk? But, though *I could walk*, and *I might walk*, are synonymous assertions, there is a difference in the question forms, *Could* you walk? and *Might* you walk? The first is, Are you able to walk? and the next, Are you permitted, or have you the right or liberty, to walk? So, *I can*, or *I may*, force him to refund, are equal, but differ as questions, for, *Can* I force him, is, Have I the power, and *May* I force him, is, Am I permitted, does the law allow me, or, have I the right—to force him to refund?

You will now observe that *shall* and *must* have often the same signification, when you speak of others, or the second or third persons. *He shall go*, and *He must go*, are alike. Both imply, that you will take care that he do go. But *I must go*, means that I am inclined, obliged, or that it is my duty, to go. Yet this last sense only, and no other, could be inferred if you said, *I should*, or *I ought to go*. Now this is

curious. We see that *must* may give the sense of *should* or *ought*, but if they be substituted for *must* we have then a distinct and confined meaning to the whole expression.

The sense of *must*, is sometimes changed to *it is necessary*, and this even in the second and third persons. Suppose I ask, Pray how is this trooper to get to Swampfield? and you answer, "He must go on foot, because the path is not fit for a horse," you mean only by *must*, that it is necessary for him to go on foot—you care not whether he goes or stays. It may appear needless to explain such a common thing, which every one knows, but I do it to convince you, how futile it is to give anything like an exclusive meaning to the word.

Though *shall* has, in the first persons, a generally indeterminate character, it is, with propriety, used in positive cases, instead of *will*. In strictness, such expressions as these require *will*, I shall now proceed, I shall now explain, I shall not trouble you any longer, I shall plainly show. But, even when we see that the writer fulfils what he promises, and though we must admit his right to *will*, we are more pleased with his diffident, however less correct, *shall*, because its modesty is more agreeable. Nay, we even say, *I shall be much obliged by your sending*, though it is intended to express undoubted obligation or gratitude. The *shall* here elegantly says, I will, as far as I can promise, from my own frail nature, be ——. But in common, or what I might call downright cases, *shall* is improper. You should say, If you give me the horse, I *will* pay you forty pounds, though, as you have it already explained, you might say, you *shall* be paid forty pounds. Our ear is hurt by reading, *This shall be found in the next chapter*. Every one feels that it ought to be *will*, because the assertion is of too direct and mechanical a nature to sanction any diffidence in the writer. Following this up, here are two examples as an exercise for the understanding :—

An examination of this, *will* be found in the next chapter.
This *shall* be examined in the next chapter.

Here are two expressions of precisely the same import. They both make an assertion, that something will be exa-

mined in the next chapter, and why could not *shall* be used in both? The distinction, I admit, seems nice, but it can be explained notwithstanding. In the first, we have a *bona fide* promise, that a certain examination will be found in the next chapter, and if we do not find it there, we conclude that the writer has forgotten it. But is not the same *bona fide* promise in the second? No doubt it is, but then the writer, by the change of expression, or rather of construction, appears to take something more upon himself. In both forms, we know that it is the writer who is to be the examiner, but his identity is more marked in the second, and it therefore admits of *shall*, because he seems to say to the reader, "though I promise to examine this, perhaps you may not think that it deserves to be called an examination." Considerations like these lie, however, only in the breast of the writer, and he might say *will* as well as *shall*, though, in the first example, *shall* would be perfectly ridiculous, even in the privileged mouth of a genuine Bow-bell-sound-born cockney.

However I may speak to you, concluding, that you are unacquainted with grammar, I know that you went through it in learning to read, though you did not then, nor do you now, understand it. At that time, I mean in your school-days, you read of certain little words, "defective verbs," or "signs," or "auxiliaries," but which I call conjugators, and you may recollect, at least, something about them. You will therefore, be surprised when I tell you, that *shall* has, sometimes, the sense of *ought*. *We shall have fine weather after this rain*, means, *We ought to have fine weather*—that is, It is reasonable to think that there will be fine weather, for the *shall* is only your opinion, that there *should* or *ought* to be fine weather. So, as I told you, that *I think I shall* was improper, you may wonder why *I should think* is right, seeing that *shall* is the root of *should*, and still more when *I shall think*, may be used. But these apparent discrepancies can be made clear enough.

I should think means, *I ought to think*, or *It is fair for me to think*, and *I shall think* is only a less marked mode of saying *I will think*. If you go to Petersburg I shall think

you mad—here *think* is only another word for *consider*, and you may say *shall* or *will*, according to your feelings. In promissory answers, where there is no doubt of power, *will* is more satisfactory, as being more decisive, than *shall*. I shall think of your claim—here, the *shall* is only a *may* or *perhaps*, but *will* assures me that my claim is to be taken into consideration. In promises where nothing is asked, *shall* is generally preferred, but this has been already explained.

Should and *if* are sometimes the same. *Should* his father hear of it, he will be vexed. Put *if* in place of *should*, and there will not be a shade of difference. For in the present instance, any strained conception of a past sense to *should*, is unworthy of notice, and I take the opportunity to compliment Mr. Lennie, for venturing to insert in his grammar, some excellent observations on this head. Speaking of the “auxiliaries” he says, “the precise time is generally determined by the drift or scope of the sentence, or rather by the adverb or participle that is subjoined or understood, and not by these auxiliaries.” This is a cruel blow to the schoolmen. It deprives them of a constant source of harmless amusement, in displaying a vast fund of learning to prove, what no one ever denied—that the “auxiliaries,” particularly *must* and *ought*, “appear,” to have, occasionally, a present and past time or signification.

Having already given you an example where none of the “signs” can be substituted for *would*, I shall now present *should* in a similar situation. When you say, I *should* not now know John if I saw him, it means, that his features have glided out of your recollection, but *would* gives us to understand, that you do not choose to know him. This is, indeed, a very important difference, but here Englishmen do not make mistakes—it is for the benefit of the Scotch and Irish that the remark is offered, and since my hand is in, I may as well give them another warning, about a blunder which is confined to them. They ask, will I, instead of shall I, as the English do, and this is a great fault. When asked, will I go? will I do this or that? it would be a proper answer to ask in turn, How can I tell whether you will or no? It is *folly* to argue that the construction holds good in the most refined

tongues, and even in German which has its *sollen* or *shall*. Every language has its own peculiarities, and this is, I think, a great beauty in English. It invests *shall* with all the various shades of permission or opinion, for, shall I go to the meeting? may mean, according to the station of the person addressed, may I go, is it your wish that I go, do you think it right for me to go, to the meeting? But we often use *if* and *should*, though it is plain tautology, thus, If his father should hear of it. Leaving out the *should*, we have complete and grammatical sense, for it is but a disguised repetition of *if* under the name of *should*—indeed, according to Horne Tooke, they are here the same, for he says, that *if* signifies *granted*, and certainly so does *should*, when put in its place. Must it not, therefore, be a great breach of propriety to say, If his father should hear of it? However, as the double contingency is sanctioned by the first writers, we cannot object to its use. I have offered my remarks only to show you what various shapes and forms those little important words sometimes assume. Here is *should* precisely the same thing as *if*, while its root *shall* has no such bearing. Shall *his father hear of it* becomes interrogative, and, since *shall* cannot take the place of *if*, it seems to make the conditional future character somewhat stronger, by saying, If his father shall hear of it, he will be vexed.

I shall now proceed to show, why the term CONJUGATORS is preferable to “signs,” or “auxiliary,” or “helping,” or “defective verbs.” There are, in reality, but three auxiliary verbs in our language, that of existence *to be*, that of possession *to have*, and that of action *to do*. These are truly verbs, because they have not only infinitives but active and passive participles. When an English verb loses its infinitive, it ceases to be a verb, and it ought to take some other title. But suppose I admit, to quiet the grammatical “dogs of war,” that it may be called a defective verb, will they insist that words, like some of our conjugators, as *must* or *can*, which perhaps never had infinitives, should be called verbs? To me it appears of no consequence whether they ever had infinitives, for I maintain that *will*, which has the strongest claim, is, as a conjugator, now very different from the verb

to *will*, and our grammarians, by confounding them, prevent their being clearly understood.

Mr. Walker gives "SHALL, v. def.," and "WILL, v. a." It is time to lay aside distinctions that tend to nothing but misconception. As an active verb, *will* is now so old-fashioned, that it may be very fairly considered obsolete. Who uses it at the present day? Who says *I will that you* —, or *I willed, I have or had willed, I shall will, I might will*, or any of its regular verbal constructions? Should any one now understand the imperative *will*? No. Instead of *Will that*, we now say, *Order or Command that*. It is, indeed, still continued in a testamentary sense, nor do I wish to disturb that application, but in any other usage, it is only a kind of metonymy, for, *I would that he may reform* is nothing more than *I wish that he may reform*.

Will has, therefore, virtually, and by common consent, laid down its claims as a verb, except for testamentary expression, and even there, *bequeathed* and *leave* have nearly extinguished it. How then can we call it an auxiliary verb, when it is, evidently, but a sort of stronger *shall*? Take it in its undisputed verbal form, and what is the result of that test? If I say *I will my house*, it tells nothing, though in a sense the most advantageous—we ask, To whom? But our three *real* auxiliaries have no such defects. *I am* a man, or my own cook, *I have* a horse, *I do* my duty, or my own business, are expressions that stand alone and unsupported. The auxiliaries themselves, however, can be only partially varied or inflected without the conjugators, which are, to all intents and purposes, the same as the different terminations in Latin and other languages. I therefore respectfully submit, that the name, CONJUGATORS, which I have adopted, be henceforth their designation. It removes much distracting ambiguity, tells, at once, the parts that they have to play in the grammatical drama, gives the pupil an instantaneous conception of their duties, and saves a great deal of very unprofitable discussion.

The inflection of English verbs is effected by the three auxiliaries mentioned, *to be*, *to have*, and *to do*, and ten words which are properly our conjugators:—

<i>Root.</i>	<i>Derivative.</i>
WILL	and WOULD.
SHALL	and SHOULD.
MAY	and MIGHT.
CAN	and COULD.
	MUST
	OUGHT.

Thus is the whole business of English conjugation managed. *If* is only a word generally selected, to explain subjunctive or conditional construction, for others, as *lest*, *though*, *unless*, and even *whether*, or *except*, would answer the purpose. The same may be said of *let*, for, though not a conjunction, it no more belongs to the imperative, than *if* does to the subjunctive mood. *Let* is a perfect verb of itself, and has a meaning similar to *permit*, though formerly it implied the opposite, to *hinder*, as where Hamlet exclaims, "I'll make a ghost of him that lets me." Mr. Lennie has, very judiciously, excluded it from the imperative, and gives only the second person, singular and plural. He also evinces good judgment in rejecting so many tenses from the subjunctive, and referring them to the indicative, mood, but he ought to have given the past or imperfect of the passive thus, *Were I loved*, or *if I were loved*, and so on through the persons. That would show the true dignity of the mood, to which it is entitled, when not absolutely depending upon *if* or any other conjunction. We see that even the present tense can work by itself, for, instead of, *If I be loved*, we can say, *Be I*, or any of the other persons, *loved*. No one who understands English, could mistake the sense of this, *Be I loved*, or *be I not*, I will court the lady. There can be no *grammatical* objection—the only charge is, that it appears quaint or unfashionable, like our discarded *kath*. All those subjunctive or imperative examples that require conjunctions or extraneous verbs are, therefore, nothing more than ordinarily constructed sentences, and do not properly belong to English conjugation.

But grammarians may be alarmed at this word conjugator, lest it might put them under the necessity of admitting a new part of speech. There is no reasonable ground for any fear in this respect. What are the verbal terminations in

other languages but conjugators? As well might one say, that our genitive case is a part of speech. We may still keep sacred the tuneful Nine, without the slightest danger of misleading the youthful pupil :—

Q. What are conjugators?

A. They are certain words that were, in ancient times, verbs, but which, from the difficulty of managing them in that manner, were insensibly stripped of their verbal functions, and now only serve for conjugation, as change of termination in other languages.

Q. How many conjugators are there?

A. Ten. *Here name them.*

Q. To what part of speech do they belong?

A. As they were formerly verbs, we may still consider them as belonging to the fifth, but in parsing we call them conjugators, as more plainly denoting their present use.

So far, to quiet the fears of innovation in grammar systems, and questions like the following might safely elucidate *times* :

Q. Are the derivatives always the past times of their roots?

A. Not now, though they formerly were, for the different times of them, as well as of their roots, are chiefly denoted by the words that precede or follow.

Q. Is this the reason that *must* and *ought*, which have no derivatives, appear occasionally in different times?

A. Yes.

The following will explain *some* of the uses of our conjugators, for it would be very difficult to comprise them all, in any exhibition of examples :—

I CAN do it, and I think I WILL—so COULD John if he WOULD but take courage, though I SHOULD not like to urge him, because his father MIGHT be displeased. We SHALL find, however, that John MAY lawfully do it, but he MUST be responsible himself, for he OUGHT to consult his father.

Having mentioned the verb *to love*, of which our grammar writers are so fond, I cannot forbear saying a word upon the subject. As it is of the greatest importance that things should, as nearly as possible, have their right names and functions, especially when we undertake instruction, this word is a most unfortunate selection, and I am certain that it much retards the improvement of the pupil. But grammarians too often work mechanically—not intellectually. Would they but *mentally* consider this word through all its moods and tenses, its inefficiency, nay its absurdity, as an explicator, must be manifest.

Every school-child has a notion of what love is, and can understand it even beyond the sense of *esteem*. Love can. ot

be forced, for though we may figuratively say, I will force you to love me, it only means that by a certain line of conduct, I hope to inspire you with love, or with estimation, of me. What idea, then, can the pupil have of the regular march or power of verbs, by the *I will bes, I will have beens, shall have, shall have beens*, and other explicative constructions of *to love*? Substitute *to carry*, or even *to court*, and see how clear every variation of tense appears. Mr. Murray has, in the first future tense of the subjunctive mood, "If I shall or will be loved." Only think of If I will be loved! This is really shibbolethical, and I give it up at once.

If *to love* be an objectionable expounder in English, how much worse in Latin, where the pupil finds *amaturus*, about to love! Can he conceive it possible to be *about* to love! So then he is taught to believe that he may very properly say, I am about or going, to love or to esteem such-a-one, just as if he were about to walk, to fish or to hunt. True it is that he finds *amaturus*, I think, in Juvenal, but it is only used sarcastically, on asking an old woman who is evincing, what we call, *young notions*, when she should be thinking of the grave, Are you about to love! But the Latin, with all its advantages of inversion and inflection, must yield to the English in copiousness. It had no single word to represent our verb *to court*, and *amare* often stood for that, as well as *to love*, and *to make love*, but of this the pupil is told nothing.

No verb should, in a grammar, be given as a primary example of conjugation, unless one that will be consistent throughout. For this reason, *dine* is not proper, because the beginner should not be suffered even for a moment to think, that *I am dined* is allowable. Ignorant people sometimes say, *he was dined and often breakfasted too, at John's expense*, though it is remarkable that they never use *supped* in this way. But I shall be told, that active and neuter verbs are always separately explained. Is it not, however, very easy to give, *at first*, such a one as will bear all possible transitions, and reserve distinctions until the whole process of conjugation be understood? Nor should words that give a different passive sense be adopted, as *succeed*. A boy will

always consider this as *prosper*, yet when he comes to *I am succeeded*, it then, if it have any meaning, assumes the character of *succession*, and has no relation to *prosperity* or *success*, with which he set out to conjugate. Neither should a word like *disperse* be introduced, because, in the passive, it is of use for the plural persons only. *I am dispersed* is nonsense, like *I am succeeded*, though *we are dispersed* is good, and therefore, all such verbs should be excluded from first explanations. To instruct young persons as rationally as possible, upon all occasions, instead of suffering them to go on like mere parrots, is of more consequence than is generally imagined.

I was about to omit these observations, but I let them stand, when I saw that they must be serviceable to every reflecting mind, with or without a knowledge of grammar. However, you may consider them only as a digression, and we shall now proceed to our original topic.

Those little conjugating words which I have undertaken to explain, are of the greatest importance to our language. But, though otherwise easy enough, when you write, you occasionally find some embarrassment or uncertainty about their proper use, and you then, naturally enough, refer to a grammar. There you find awkward attempts to fix their particular and exclusive functions—awkward, it is true, yet sufficiently dogmatical, to perplex and alarm an unsophisticated head. Not a word about their having, sometimes, the same meaning. No. That, the grammar-writers dare not mention, even if it were their wish. They must feel and know it as well as I, but they are either unwilling to grapple with the cherished precept, or they fear that their books would be thrown out of the schools. They tell us, that they are imperfect verbs, which by some unknown misfortune, have lost their moods, conjugations, and tenses, and that they have now only a kind of imperfectly present and past sense, though they were formerly very respectable—that *must* and *ought* came off worse than the others, being condemned to hobble, as well as they can, in a sort of single-double time. They then give some examples of their

separate duties, and there they leave the humble inquirer, who comes for information of a different character.

I must do Mr. Lennie justice, by remarking that he says, "Should is sometimes used instead of ought." But there he stops short—further he would not venture, thinking, perhaps, that he had said as much as was prudent. "Sometimes!" So then, Mr. Lennie, you do admit that *should* is *sometimes* used instead of *ought*! Now what do you think of substituting *may be always* for *sometimes*? Pray tell us when "*should*" *cannot* be used instead of "*ought*?" for, monstrous and shocking as it may appear, I am prepared to prove, that *should* can always supply *ought*, though *ought* cannot always supply *should*.

I never was so forcibly struck with the absurdity—I had almost said, the cruelty, of our *ought* expositions, than in looking at them in a grammar for teaching English to the French. There, examples for *ought* were given, which would do equally well for *should*, and thus integrity was absolutely sacrificed, merely to cover our own ignorance of *ought*. Something was necessary to be done with it, and so the poor foreigner was duped by an explanation that only added to his difficulties. In teaching ourselves, it is not so injurious, because our ears hourly show us the folly of such grammar definitions, but it is cruel to mock the confiding stranger by untenable directions. Why not tell him plainly, that, in endeavouring to extricate ourselves from the confusion of a parcel of German "auxiliaries," we gave the sense of *duty* to *should*, without recollecting *ought*, and that it was found convenient to let both stand?

Ought is, however, a very beautiful conjugator in our language. It relieves the monotony of the frequent *shoulds* that must, otherwise, be introduced, where sentences are formed of different *obligatory* expressions. Besides there are occasions where it *appears* to be more pointed than *should*, though it have really no more intrinsic value.

The following is given for curiosity, to show what strange constructions of our conjugators used to be sanctioned. It is taken from Dacre's translation of Machiavel's "Prince," chap. vii. London, Charles Harper, 1674:—

And this he (Francis, Duke of Milan) was able to have effected, that if he could not have made him Pope whom he would, he could have hindered him that he would not should be Pope.

Writing compels every man to think, and, therefore, when Englishmen take up the pen, keeping in mind that I always allude to those of humble education, they discover the fallacy of that mischievous assertion, that they all know intuitively, the proper use of *shall* and *will*, and the other conjugators. But as I observed that the French and others, who have no *shall* in their own language, easily learn the German *sollen*, it is fair that we bear not too hard upon ourselves. Compared to the German people, we are but children in the use of *shall*. They had it, originally, in their language, while it is only lately that we began to understand it at all, or rather to make a decent attempt at fixing its sense. We know that Chaucer used it as we do the verb *to owe*, not much more than four hundred years since, and I have observed that Lord Bacon, though little above two centuries, brings it sometimes into his writings, not exactly conformable to the usages of the present day. It has been justly observed, that a hundred years in government is but as ten in man's ordinary life, and so it is with languages. English is the youngest of all. We received a crowd of those auxiliary verbs, from different nations who had been long accustomed to their use, and we knew not how to manage them. We got some that seemed to be the same as others—we got, for instance, *shall*, and besides *owe*, and it may be said that we got a touch of the Swedish *skall* mixed up with the German *sollen* and *mussen*. Floundering on in this perplexity, we insensibly stripped them of their verbal functions, and reduced them to the state of mere conjugators. This was the first step towards rendering them manageable, and distinguishing our language by a remarkable, and I think a very beautiful, peculiarity of verbal inflection.

But a great deal yet remains to be done. We have, it is true, effected much in fixing the functions of our conjugators, and *shall* is certainly that which appears to be the most undefinable. That it should be so is a serious reproach to the judgment of Englishmen, and, instead of hugging each other in the childish notion that they only can understand it, they do but expose themselves to the painful charge of being in

the infancy of their language. Besides, it could be easily proved that they do not understand it, first, because any grammatical construction that is understood, can be explained, and next, because, while believing in the doctrine of fixedness, they sometimes use *shall* for *will* and *will* for *shall*, with precisely the same views and feelings. Amongst English writers, there are constantly found differences in the use and application of those words, and every one of discernment can perceive, in conversation with a well-educated Englishman, that he has more *wills* and *woulds*, and less of those eternal *shalls* and *shants* with which the lower orders are inoculated. Still we are told, that an Englishman sucks in with his first milk, the genuine and pure knowledge of *shall* and *will*!

CHAPTER XI.

SYNONYMOUS WORDS.

EXPERIENCE has convinced me, that plain explanation cannot be injurious to instruction. I make the remark, because I know, that many otherwise learned and sensible men conceal the truth, through a fear that too much knowledge may divert the pupil from a proper steadiness to the observance of rules. They fear, that anything like a latitude or discretion will produce heedlessness, and, under this impression, they give directions that positively mislead, fill the mind with wrong notions, and throw a most prejudicial taint of doubt and error upon the future reasonings of the learner.

Satisfied I am, and I think I ever must be, that this is a very erroneous doctrine. Far be it from me to support, pragmatically, inconvenient principles merely because they may be abstractedly right. Severe philosophy says, "if truth be good, it should be spoken at all times," but De Stael, though a woman, has, in my opinion, clearly proved, that by adhering to such an "axiom," we may shock the fairest notions of humanity and virtue. A man who sets up for rigid integrity,

should never hesitate an instant about truth, where himself is singly concerned—it is only where others are involved, that it is lawful to consider, whether his truth-telling may injure the virtuous and the innocent. In that consists, what I would call the true nobility of this part of philosophy.

After these observations, which I deem necessary as an anticipation of artful objections, we may now proceed. In the last chapter I think I have shown, that where our conjugators have different meanings, and where another word has sometimes effectively, the same import, it is foolish and injurious to fix an exclusive sense or place for one, or, in plainer language, to conceal the truth. What danger could possibly arise from honestly saying, that *shall* and *should* are often so synonymous to *will* and *would*, that it is indifferent which be selected? Or that *shall* and *must*, *may* and *can*, *could* and *might* with *ought* and *should*, are frequently equal to each other? Would not this be better than to tell the pupil, what he finds to be false in practice—even in the practice of his teacher? All young people have a high opinion of their masters, and when they perceive strange incongruities between rules and performance, they are filled with doubts that cloud the understanding, and much retard improvement.

Let us now argue amicably, and hear the other side. We shall take *should* and *ought* for a general illustration. The grammarian says, “I know that *should* can supply *ought*, but it would not be advisable to tell that to a boy, lest he make too wild a use of *should*. We rather make him think that *ought* has its own exclusive sense, particularly as there are occasions where it is peculiarly expressive, and far superior to *should*.” In answering this, I must first observe, that grammars, however designed for youth, are read also in mature age, and any imprudent or ill-judged concealment, equally operates against the adult. But I assert, that it does not require much judgment to explain, upon all grammatical occasions, with perfect *safety*. Could there be any possible danger in something like the following?—

The assertion may, perhaps, be hazarded, that *should* can always supply *ought*, though it is unnecessary to remark, that *ought* cannot always supply *should*. It appears, however, that *ought* seems better upon many occasions, particularly when a strong force of duty is to be expressed. Undoubtedly

one may say, *We should love our neighbour as ourselves*, but *ought to* gives greater weight and is therefore preferable. By attention to those distinctions, you will produce the more elegant English, and show yourself better informed than students who are less observant. Besides *ought* frequently saves disagreeable repetitions of *should*, as *You ought to pay John, for you should recollect, that he ought not to suffer for his confidence, though I admit that he should have demanded security.*

Now, I ask would not this be better, both for young and old, than any mysterious concealment? By such an explanation, the learner would proceed with increased alacrity, and be enabled to devote the time that he loses in fruitless considerations, to the exercise of his understanding, and to the acquirement of new information. It is asserted that no two words can have precisely the same signification, and that a new one never finds its way into a language, except through a necessity of expressing a minute shade of meaning that was before wanted. Now this is a most palpable absurdity. This is what serves to keep up the puzzling system—to deter the humble writer from wielding his pen, and to make him look with increased admiration upon the great men who know all those marvellous distinctions.

As to other words not having the same meaning, it would be easy to adduce numerous instances to the contrary. Some will, always, have exactly the same as others, while some will only exercise this privilege, just like our conjugators, on particular occasions. We can see no difference between *heavy* and *weighty*. In a ponderal sense, they are perfectly alike. We may say, a heavy man, or a weighty man, but if we allude to his being dull, *weighty* is thrown out, and *heavy* comes in for its exclusive application. Such instances might be multiplied, so as to fill a folio volume.

There is no difference whatsoever between *cecily* and *blindness*, to *objurgate* and to *chide*, *opacity* and *cloudiness*, *mendacity* and *lying*, *inimical* and *hostile*, to *congregate* and to *assemble*, *mendicant* and *beggar*, *orifice* and *opening*, *paucity* and *fewness*, *perilous* and *dangerous*, *loquacious* and *talkative*, and it is not easy, even from our dictionaries, to make out any particular difference in viscid, viscous, glutinous and clammy. These, and many hundreds besides, have found a place, not through any want or necessity, but because of their greater elegance or purer blood, and because a choice of words

enriches a language. Pauper, geography, mancœuvre, encyclopædia, polygamy, synecdoche, and others innumerable, are necessary, because they save us additional words in description, and rescue our speech from the charge of poverty and meanness. Yet we still require some helps. Nothing is, perhaps, more desirable than a substitute for *disagreeable* and *unpleasant*, when applied to express dissatisfaction. Do our best, and we cannot keep *flavour* or *taste* out of view. About fifty years since *annoying* offered its services, and was much used, but it is found not to be exactly the thing required. The French lie under the same inconvenience—if they did not, we should, long ago, have had an appropriate word.

But it is very important, that you should be relieved from those doubts that frighten the unpractised writer, respecting the precise and exclusive meaning of words. You may rest assured that the very first authors who treat the subject, do not—cannot confine themselves to their own express rules and doctrines. They only go as close as they can, and more will not, certainly, be expected from you. Neither are you to hesitate about using well-known words which you cannot find in the dictionary. Lexicographers are unwilling to take the responsibility of introducing what all their predecessors rejected. This reluctance gives rise to curious omissions. *Respectability*, *unconnected*, and *pedestrian*, though used by the most eminent writers, were without a place till Todd inserted them, and also *realisation*, at his own *risk*, in his valuable edition of Johnson, and we may now calculate on their general recognition. He has also the good sense to insert *amelioration*, for who would now think of seeking it under the letter M? In other languages we have the same squeamishness. I believe that none of our Latin dictionaries give *gravamen*, although it is a word commonly known even to plain English scholars—it is inserted, however, without *scruple*, by Facciolati. The unnatural jumbling together of I and J, and U and V, remains still as our reproach. We might, surely, very safely depart from a custom that can serve no purpose, except to render search the more difficult. On the Continent they have, generally, long since made the proper separation, and we would only show our sense of

propriety, by abandoning this miserable compliment to our "venerable ancestors." Only a few here have complied with my hint.

Though it may be right that new words, or new applications of them, should be some years on probationary abeyance, before admission into our dictionaries, yet you must go on like other persons. Mr. Walker, who overcame more of those scruples than, I believe, any of his fellow-labourers, unwarily uses words in the explanatory parts of his dictionary, to which he nevertheless refuses a regular place! Of those I once noted I think five, and I regret that I have lost the list, but I recollect that *respectability* was one of them. Now, when a dictionary-maker can, through mere force of general usage, so far forget himself, surely you need not give yourself any uneasiness.

It may be right to remark upon the *fashions* of particular application. I have told you that *orifice* and *opening* are precisely the same. So they are, but fashion has decreed that we must not say the *orifice* of a discourse, although we know that it is the same thing as *opening*. The people may *congregate* or *assemble*, but you cannot politely say that ladies *congregated* at a ball. You may dislike the *paucity* or *fewness* of directions, but not so as to information. Here, *paucity* assumes the character of *scarcity*, which *fewness* cannot. Fashion has fixed it, that *paucity* is both *fewness* and *scarcity*, and even *deficiency*, while *fewness* is condemned never to rise above its original signification. This is the reason why you must say the *paucity*, not the *fewness*, of information—and thus you see the privileges that classical words obtain, even when quite unnecessary, as a kind of bonus or interest for the loan of them.

In the seventh paragraph of Chapter VIII. I gave you a good hint respecting synonymous words. It is very necessary, that you divest yourself of those fears, with which the writings of some unquestionably learned authors would fill your mind. When men engage in nice distinctions, they commonly travel more into the regions of curiosity than of utility—they forget the impossibility of practical application to the purposes of life. An inch may be divided into a

thousand parts, but we shall find a hundred too much for the naked eye. There are some who think they see, and would persuade us that there is, a difference between *cumulate*, *monish*, *commix*, *commixion*, *disherit*, *mislike*, *unequalness*, *over-burden*, *cotemporary*, and *accumulate*, *admonish*, *mix*, *mixture*, *disinherit*, *dislike*, *inequality*, *over-load*, *contemporary*, nay, between *though* and *although*, *while* and *whilst*, *among* and *amongst*, *till* and *until*. But, supposing a difference to exist, it is too subtle for the ablest management. I once heard an inveterate Latinist assert, that we ought to have *responsable*, as well as *responsible*, because their meanings were not strictly alike, according to their respective derivation! Such a *purist* could write a book upon the distinctive characters of *vel* and *aut*, or *sed* and *autem*, but after all it would come to this—the Romans knew, by habit, when one fell in more elegantly than the other, as an Englishman prefers saying *The House of God* to *God's House*, though he knows that both are equally proper. Our dictionaries have a horror of giving the same meaning to two words, even where there is not a shade of difference, and this greatly embarrasses the humble or diffident writer.

But you can never expect to write well, or with spirit, if you have a poor notion of our language. Let no one persuade you, that it is inferior to others, in every respect. Our little conjugators express the most minute shades and distinctions—sometimes to a nicety that even the Greek and Latin, with all their pompous terminations, cannot approach. Those classical tongues are compelled to say, Will I give John the horse? unless they turn it otherwise by, Are you willing that I should give? No language in the world, except your own, has the beautiful and singularly expressive *shall* as a conjugator, for the German *sollen*, though an auxiliary verb, is, in many instances, more confined in its application. Were I addressing a grammarian, I would show our superiority in many other respects. Hear, however, what is said by Barberi in his admirable Italian grammar—admirable indeed, for it leaves most grammars far behind, in accurate and profound reasoning. He is

speaking of those pests of speech called genders and articles :—

The English are the only people who have not this inconvenience in their language. They make no distinction in the genders of things, and they have only one article for all nouns, whether singular or plural, which is very rational, and, above all, extremely convenient.

Should any foolish pedant annoy you, about the superior beauties of the classical languages, desire him to translate into Latin or Greek, "cloud-capt tower," or "baseless fabric." He may, with many words, give the sense, in a roundabout way, but as to energy and conciseness, they are confined to the English. Tell him then, that his learning is only a burthen, not a service to him, since it does not enable him to see the beauties of his mother tongue. The truth is, that each language has its own particular and exclusive advantages, and to form one, combining the excellences of all others, is beyond our reach.

CHAPTER XII.

GENITIVE COMMA.

THIS, usually called Apostrophe, as John's book, for The book of John, is too well known to require explanation, but there are other applications of it not so commonly understood, and the description of which may be acceptable.

Names ending with *s* have the genitive sign only, without any additional *s*, thus, Achilles' wrath, Xerxes' folly, and they are pronounced as they now appear. For it is with that view that Achilles's wrath, or Xerxes's folly, is exploded, as otherwise we should pronounce Achilleses and Xerxeses, which would offend the ear even in prose. Yet this rule must be occasionally infringed. We must exercise some *taste*, for it would be barbarous to say James' book. Why it would sound as if *book* were the surname, and that we were speaking of one James Book, and we therefore write in

the ancient way, James's book. It is remarkable that Charles presents no objection, for *Charles' book* sounds very well. We must, I say, exercise our taste, even with classical names, for Miletus' anger certainly reads *queerish*. How different in fulness of sound from Hercules' anger! We might say Miletuses rancour, but who could bear to utter Sophocleuses or Euripidesees tragedies?

The printer's address, means the address of the printer, while the printers' address, means the address of a body of printers, or of more than one of that trade. This distinguishing of singular and plural is rather a modern application of the apostrophe, and, as it is found useful, you should know its management. We write as our forefathers did, A day's work, but for the plural, Two days' work, and so on all similar occasions. You must observe to write proper names ending with *s* in full, as Evans, for Evan's Grand Hotel would signify the Grand Hotel of Evan, but Evans's or Evans' Grand Hotel ensures correctness. It is quite a matter of choice as to the two last—you may write which you please. Mr. Jenkins' horse is the horse of Mr. Jenkins, but Mr. Jenkin's horse is the horse of Mr. Jenkin.

CHAPTER XIII.

ELLIPSES.

ORDINARY language, as distinguished from the tiresome precision of legal acts or documents, is made up of *ellipses* or omissions. Thus, "Charles was a spirited, liberal, and humane governor," if put *in extenso* or at length would be, "Charles was a spirited governor, Charles was a liberal governor, and Charles was a humane governor." You see that this, while it is not a whit more clear than the first, is disagreeably tautological, and the ellipsis is, therefore, a great advantage to speech, whether oral or written.

Now I will show how you can turn this ellipsis and

extenso to profitable purpose. There is a very common error, one that you probably make yourself, "Between you and I," and which nine in ten say, though it is an unpardonable blunder. Put it *in extenso*, and the cloven foot immediately appears, for it would then read "Between you, and between I," and, as no ear could bear *between I*, you naturally say *between me*. Thus you find out, that "Between you and me" is the correct and grammatical expression.

There is another common error, for, unfortunately, vastly more speakers are wrong than right, "Him and I went to Highgate." Try this by the *extenso* test, and you discover that *Him* should be *He*, for you surely would not say Him went to Highgate. But we mostly hear "Him and me went to Highgate," in which is an additional blunder of *me* for *I*. Ask yourself "Did *me* go to Highgate?" and, if you have any ear at all, it must revolt against such a sound. "My uncle gave cousin James and I a christmas-box," is a very common mode of expression, for it has nothing harsh to the ear, but it is quite different *in extenso*, "My uncle gave cousin James a christmas-box, and my uncle gave *me* a christmas-box," for I am sure you would not say *gave I a christmas-box*. Some persons, who are filled with doubts on all occasions, will contend that *christmas-boxes* should be put instead of *a christmas-box*, otherwise it might be supposed that the uncle gave only one christmas-box for the use of his two nephews. The folly of such a cavil is shown by the *extenso* test, thus, "My uncle gave cousin James christmas-boxes, and my uncle gave me christmas-boxes." You see, therefore, that the ordinary expression is correct, for it implies that the uncle gave *each* a christmas-box. But our caviller will say, Suppose a horse instead of a christmas-box, which might be given for the joint use of both nephews? I answer, that in such case it should be so specified, or the sentence should be turned with a different construction.

But take care! your *extenso* test will not always avail. Suppose you say, "Peter and I *was* at Gravesend yesterday," and that some one observes it is wrong, and you supply the ellipses, it will then read, "Peter *was* at Gravesend yesterday, and I *was* at Gravesend yesterday." Now that is excellent

grammar as it stands, but not as you expressed it, because where only one verb was used to denote the action of both Peter and yourself, it required the plural *were*. So, "He and the child *is* out" reads correctly when at length, "He is out, and the child is out," but the first construction requires *are* for the same reason that *was* should be *were* in the preceding example. "John and I done it easily," would give *in extenso*, "John done it easily, and I done it easily," which is shocking to a grammatical ear—*done* must be replaced by *did*.

Nor must the ellipses be abused, however necessary it may be to obviate useless and disagreeable tautology. "He went to Spain by sea, and Portugal by land." Here the omission of *to* before Portugal is contemptible, and no one could think of it but those sorry writers whom I described in Chap. III., as labouring under the fear of repeating a word. No. The ellipses is intended to give energy and vigour, not weakness to our language.

We daily and hourly hear blunders about the past participle and past tense, by putting one for the other, where the verb is irregular. Thus, I have often *went* there, should be *gone*. After he had *sang*, should be *sung*, though you may say indifferently, After he sang or sung, because that is the past tense, but *had* requires the past participle, which is confined to *sung*. This must be *drank* off at once, should be *drunk*, but They *drunk* a great deal, should be *drank*. I *seen* him often, should be *saw*, but you may say I have *seen* him often. After we had *took* in some provisions, should be *taken*—leave out *had*, and *took* will be good. The bread has *fell*, should be *fallen*, and take care that you never use *felled*, in this case, as it applies only to knocking down generally, or to cutting down a tree. The building was *began* last year, should be *begun*—you may say, They *began* the building, but not they *begun*. His coat was *tore*, should be *torn*. That was well *wrote*, should be *written*.

He *swum* like a cork, should be *swam*, but say He could have *swum* over it easily. Ministers are *shook*, should be *shaken*, but you must say, That *shook* ministers. After I had *rang*. Look to what I said about *sang*, for it applies

here throughout. Tom *run* it before, should be *ran*, but you may say Tom had *run*. He has *chose* the white one, should be *chosen*; but leave out *has* and *chose* may stand. He was *learned* to read very early. This blunder arises from misplacing the verbs to learn and to teach. Here it should be *taught*, which is the past participle of to teach, but if *was* be omitted the phrase will be correct.

If you ask how such errors are to be avoided, I can only answer, that, without some attention or trouble, you cannot expect to do anything well. I have taken not a little pains to explain how you may, without being a grammarian, write intelligibly, and without that repulsive verbosity so common to the unlearned, but *some* knowledge of grammar is necessary, otherwise you will be in doubt or astray on the most trifling occasions. Those last-mentioned errors arise, not from forgetting but from misapplying two kinds of words, the past tense and past participle! I shall again call your attention to the subject, towards the conclusion of this work.

CHAPTER XIV.

VERY REMARKABLE INSTANCE OF LONG-WINEDNESS.

I THOUGHT that I had exhausted this subject. Yes, I believed that I had furnished the most glaring examples, but here is one that eclipses them all, and I give it because you cannot have a better lesson. It is from the "History of England" (Cabinet Cyclopædia), by Sir James Mackintosh, and I copy from a critique in the *Monthly Review* of August, 1830:—

The king, with angry murmurs, turned aside, and Robert, whose spirit was awakened by this unbrotherly repulse, returned to the duchy to try his fortune, whither Henry pursued him, and after an obstinate conflict at Tinchebrai, on the 27th of September, 1106, in which Robert made the last display of his brilliant qualities as a commander and a soldier, he was completely routed, and sent prisoner to England; where his imprisonment appears first to have been mild, but having yielded to the impulse of nature in attempting to escape from prison, by the command of his unrelenting brother, his eyes were put out, and after passing near thirty years of blindness in several fortresses, he died

in 1135, at Cardiff Castle, in Glamorganshire, at the age of eighty, when all the other chiefs who had shared the glory of rescuing Jerusalem had been laid low.

The Editor of the *Review* comments, in strong terms, on the numerous faults of this *sentence*, and thus concludes his strictures, "Finally we would ask whether 'all the other chiefs' had been laid low in the year 1135, or at the age of eighty, or both? We have seldom seen a worse piece of writing than this, in whatever way it be contemplated." It is certainly a reproach to Sir James, for, supposing him in a hurry when writing, it is to be presumed that he corrected his own proof sheets, and then he had an opportunity of seeing this unwieldy sentence in all its deformity. Such an exhibition is calculated to injure even a respectable author like him, because it might prejudice the public against his style, while it would probably ruin one who was struggling for fame. Now I shall offer no amendment. Study my directions for correcting long-windedness, and you can make this crude mass of confused relatives perfectly intelligible, and pleasing to read, by a proper distribution of the members, and a little exercise of judgment in connection. This, I say over again, is the best way to improve your own style.

CHAPTER XV.

ANTIQUITY OF THE SEMICOLON.

HAVING hazarded my opinion in Chapter VII., page 42, that the true and unmistakable semicolon appeared about 1500, and, as the "Book of Armagh" has many instances of that stop, I think it is right to say something more on the subject.

In May, 1831, this celebrated book was sold by auction, at 23, Suffolk Street, Dublin, by Mr. Edward Maguire, for 390*l.* exclusive of King's duty, 10*d.* in the pound. The catalogue announced it as a MS. of the seventh century, on the authority of Sir William Betham, Ulster King at Arms,

who devoted the entire of the 2nd vol. of his work "Irish Antiquarian Researches," to "a detailed history of this precious document." He describes it as in the Irish character, mixed with Greek capitals, and to be everywhere perfect, except in two instances, and "a few pages which have suffered so much by attrition as to deface the writing." What follows was given as extracted from the catalogue of "the learned Humphrey Lhwyd," who, after stating that it contains the Canons of the Evangelists, says:—

This book was formerly held in great estimation by the Irish, so much so, that the family commonly called *Mac Maor*, in English *Mac Mayre*, had their name from the custody of this book. For *Maor* in Irish is *Keeper*; and *Maor na-Ceanon*, is *Keeper of the Canons*; all that family were commonly so called, and they formerly held from the See of Armagh eight townlands in the county of ———, called the lands of *Ballymaire*, by the tenure of this book; in whose hands it remained during many ages, until *Florence Mac Mayre* went to England in the year 1680. That he should give evidence (which I doubt the truth of) against Oliver Plunket, D.D., the Roman Catholic Prelate of Ireland, who undeservedly, as is believed, was executed. But *Mayre* being deficient of money at his death, this manuscript was left as a pledge for five pounds; fortunately, it afterwards came to the hands of Arthur Brownlow, Esq., who, with considerable labour, placed the loose leaves in their proper order, and put folios at the top of each page, and other marks in the margin to distinguish the chapters, and had the leaves so arranged in their original binding (as it now appears), and caused them to be preserved together with a certain bull of the Roman Pontiff found with the same.

Now this book has numerous semicolons, not in that imperfect or doubtful manner that is sometimes seen in MSS. or books of the fifteenth century, and which seem like colons with the bottom point accidentally lengthened or blotted by the pen, or blurred in the printing, but as well formed and defined as at the present day. Is it, therefore, of the seventh century? That there was an original of great antiquity, appears incontestable, but it is also highly probable that, where EIGHT townlands depended on its safe keeping, the Mac Mayres would not feel easy if trusting to it entirely, and that they got a copy made out as a security in case of accident. About that there could be no difficulty. The Irish were always remarkable for their taste in caligraphy, and, even now, many of their humblest country schoolmasters have a surprising command of the pen, and write beautiful hands. If the transcription were made at the commencement of 1500, the copyist might easily mistake a

rubbed or injured colon for a semicolon, as that stop was then commonly used, and he would insert it without hesitation. Those who will not allow this view of the case must be prepared to prove, that the semicolon was known 1200 years ago, and that would I believe be somewhat difficult.

There is another point to be settled also. Is the book form 1200 years old? We know that the Greeks and Romans were ignorant of it, for at Herculaneum and Pompeii, though some thousand calcined or scorched *rolls* were found, there was no book. When was that form invented? We are told that Mr. Brownlow, in getting the Armagh work put in proper repair, had the leaves arranged in their *original BINDING*, as it now appears. "Binding!" Is there any binding of the seventh century? It is certain that the book form or plan, of leaves stitched together at the back, was invented a considerable time before binding, the first attempts at which were very rude indeed. Even the binding of only four centuries past is in the humblest state that can be well imagined—very humble truly compared to that of our Book of Armagh, a part of which is mentioned in the work itself to be written by Saint Patrick, though the rest is referred to the seventh century.

Perhaps I shall be censured for taking up any of my space with such a matter, which is purely historical, and which can be of no service to my readers for instructing them in punctuation. In my defence, I can only say that, as I could not well avoid alluding to its gradual improvements, so I could not, in justice to myself, avoid mentioning a work that so materially affected my observations.

What if the book form should turn out to be an Irish invention! This is no strained hyperbole, for we can see through the mists that obscure the remote History of Ireland, for want of an *enlightening* Roman invasion, that it was a seat of learning when Britain, and the countries of the Continent, were, comparatively, without any literature. It appears that there are two other very ancient Irish MSS. in existence, of which Sir William Betham says, "The Psalter of Columbkille,

written in the sixth century, is probably the oldest Irish MS. extant. The four gospels of *Dimma*, written early in the seventh century, is, perhaps, the oldest in the *pure Irish character*." Now I conclude that those are books, because Sir William elsewhere calls the second "The Book of Dimma." I am aware of the story that the Athenians erected a statue to one Phigeatius for inventing books, but, if that be true, why were none found in Herculaneum or Pompeii, since the Romans had everything that the Greeks knew? To prevent misconceptions, it may be right to premise that a *book* should open at the side—the first step from the roll was no doubt by connecting the sheets or leaves at the top. Ireland can probably show stronger claims to the discovery in question than any other country, and I begin to think that this digression will give rise to a literary agitation not a little interesting.

CHAPTER XVI.

A COMMON ERROR IN CONCORD.

My eye has just glanced at an advertisement beginning thus :—

The great wonder of the age is, that Grimstone's Aromatic Regenerator has and will produce a new growth of hair.

The error here, in making *has* refer to *produce*, is sufficiently obvious. Yet, if it be excusable to err in good company, our advertiser may lawfully claim that indulgence, for it is truly surprising how prevalent the same fault is in respectable works and newspapers. I am totally at a loss to account for men of erudition falling into this blunder. Surely they would not attempt to justify it by the Ellipsis, for, though that figure sanctions many omissions, it could never be strained so as to warrant the error in question. I am aware that writers, who like terseness, would very unwillingly set down "has produced, and will produce," but, however inelegant the iteration, it is preferable to the serious charge of bad

grammar, which, except in very rare exigencies, is held to be unpardonable.

We often see in books and newspapers expressions similar to "Such proceedings have and still cause great discontent,"—"have and are productive of sickness," though this last is quite inexcusable, inasmuch as it involves no repetition when in full, thus, "have been, and are, productive of sickness." But there is no licence whatever for such liberties. In page 26, it will be seen that I defend the omission of *shillings*, to save most disagreeable tautology, and I think few will object to that, but the case under present discussion is different. The greatest latitude allowed to the ellipsis I believe is, where persons are referred to verbs with which they cannot agree, as when George IV. said, "Either Londonderry or I am mad," on remarking something strange in that minister's manner, a few days before his unhappy suicide. But our grammarians, after much fruitless contention, have been forced to allow this faulty construction, and the rule now is, that the verb agree with the last person mentioned as being the less repulsive to our ear. Indeed this concession could not be avoided, for it would be absolutely intolerable, instead of "John or I, or they are accountable for the expense," to say "John *is*, or I *am*, or they *are*, accountable for the expense." It is quite clear that necessity alone authorised this breach of concord, but the case under consideration cannot plead any necessity.

Since it occurs to me, I may mention another fault that occasionally appears in the London papers. In reporting the case of a man falling from drunkenness or other cause, we read that he was *laying* in the gutter, or elsewhere. Laying what? This confounding of *lie* and *lay*, is discreditable to England, for it is remarkable that the error is unknown in Ireland, where the most ignorant man will say, "He was lying in the gutter," "The ship is lying at anchor," or "The settlement still lies over." But I must remark that it is gradually disappearing from the London press, for we do not now see it near so frequently as we used only a few years past. There is indeed such literary ability brought to bear on the respectable papers, that they bid fair, at least in the leading articles,

to be safe examples for good composition, and most certainly for punctuation. To them we are indebted for all rational improvements in pointing—to our authors and grammar-writers we truly owe very little.

CHAPTER XVII.

A WORD UPON GRAMMAR.

I ADDRESS you still, as supposing that you are unacquainted with grammar, but though I presume that you have been much assisted and encouraged by my instructions, you must be aware that some knowledge of it is necessary both for writing and speaking. Let me entreat you, therefore, to give it a little of your attention. Believe me, that it is not, now, what it was when you were at school, for a great revolution in that department has taken place within the last few years. We are no longer harassed and perplexed by half a dozen cases of nouns, nor are we any longer at the mercy of the mountebanks, who for so many centuries worked on the plan, that Latin was necessary for understanding our native language. In short, we have now *English* grammars—not Anglo-Latin grammars, such as you were tormented with at school. Everything is, now, referred to the original constitution and genius of our own language. Our old grammarians used to tell us, that the reason we must say, *It was I who conquered him*, is because it is so in Latin, although the French, which has more of Roman construction than the English, requires, *It was me who conquered him*. But the new schoolmasters are abroad, and such nonsense will no longer avail.

I have been at some pains to dissipate your fears of taking up the pen, because you do not understand grammar, but think not that it can be dispensed with, or that it is unnecessary. You have now no excuse whatever for ignorance on the subject, because there are grammars that you could easily understand, though they may be difficult for a boy.

Try and get a knowledge of the past participle, as distinguished from the past time or tense, of the irregular verbs, for it is here that the most disgraceful blunders are made, such as those on which I touched in Chapter XIII. Those who don't know them discover their ignorance in the shortest conversation, for they enter into all kinds of discourse. Yet, though there are 180 of them, I find that there are only about 50 commonly misused, and surely that would be no great task to master, especially when the thing is of such preponderating importance. I know of no literary labour that would be so well paid, for, with a knowledge of the irregular verbs, you could generally express yourself correctly, and pass very well when conversing with grammarians.

Our verbs are simplicity itself when compared with those of the French or other languages, which will have forty different terminations where ours are as efficiently worked with only half a dozen. Foreigners are surprised at their extraordinary plainness, and easily learn them, and it is a great reproach to us that they are so generally misapplied. Ignorance of the subjunctive mood may be excusable, because to understand it requires some attention and study, but it is really pitiable to find respectable men making gross blunders in the use of two words, forming the participle and past tense, and the functions of which are so simple as to be within the comprehension of a child. I must impress upon you this fact, that every one whose native language is English knows them all. You are not, therefore, called on to get off anything by heart—you are only asked to give two kinds of words, with which you are already well acquainted, their proper place, and any grown-up person, who aspires to rise at all above the vulgar, ought to feel ashamed of being ignorant on such a simple matter. Besides, in the course of your investigation you would acquire as it were insensibly, without any additional trouble, some important information about the functions of other parts of the verbs. When you see *do*, *did*, *done*—*see*, *saw*, *seen*—*draw*, *drew*, *drawn*—*choose*, *chose*, *chosen*—*begin*, *began*, *begun*, and when you know that they signify the present and past times, and the past participles, you would not shock a grammatical ear by saying “*I does*,” because,

as you mean to express present time, you see that *do* represents it for yourself, though *he* requires *does*. For the same reason you would not say, *I sees, I goes, or I says*, and you would avoid that barbarism *drowed*, because you perceive that there is no such word at all in the list, and in short you would, in spite of yourself, extend your knowledge of grammar considerably. You may be quite certain that, when you have a clear conception of past time and participle usage, you will often wonder how you could ever, even for a moment, have been dismayed by such a phantom.

The difficulties of grammar are gradually lessening, and there is a prospect of its being ultimately rendered a very easy study. Towards the close of last century, Mr. Horne Tooke published two quarto volumes which he oddly called "*Diversions of Purley*," because he wrote them at a country-house so called. The object of the work was, to prove that language has but two parts of speech, nouns and verbs, and he certainly brought forward arguments well calculated to make the other seven totter. He completely proved that *if*, which the grammarians always place among their "conjunctions," is the past participle or the imperative of *to grant, admit, or allow*, as "*If you go, so will I*," implies nothing more than "*Granted*," or "*Grant that you go, so will I*," and he further proved that *if* was originally a verb signifying *to grant*. His success here was most complete, and, could he have established all his points on equally strong grounds, he must have overthrown the established system of grammar, and simplified it in an extraordinary manner. Even as it is his theory is gradually gaining adherents, and I know that there are schoolmasters who would teach it, only they fear an outcry that might be injurious to themselves.

I am strongly inclined to recommend two grammars in our schools—one for children, and another for the more advanced youths. A grammar lately published is now before me, and though it professes to be extremely simple, and adapted for children, it is complicated enough for mature age. It has an appalling number of pronouns, tenses to verbs, and other extended classifications, that demand a steady judgment, and which it would be absurd to expect that a child under twelve

should comprehend. This accounts for the vast numbers we meet who have learned English grammar, and who are quite ignorant of its use. Too much was forced on their immature minds at first, and the consequence was that they never understood the parts of speech as respects their functions. I merely throw out this hint, because what I recommend is much wanted, and because I think that it would be justly appreciated by a discerning public.

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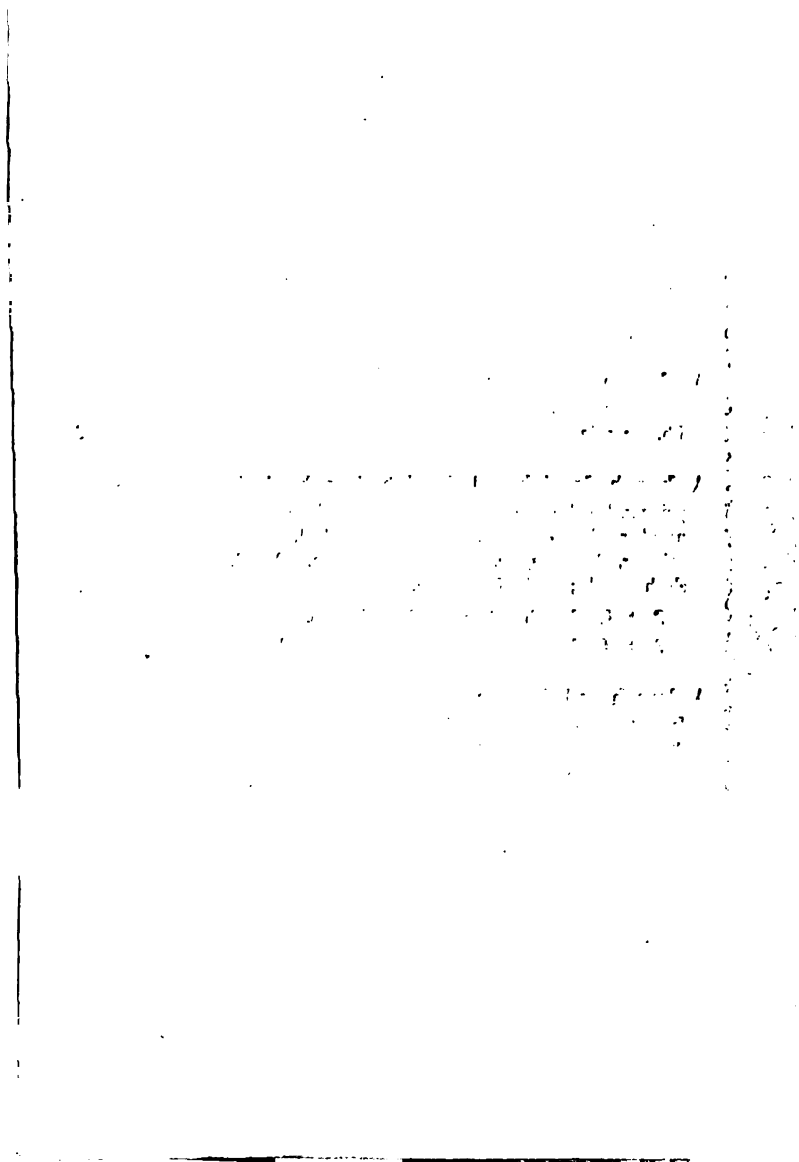
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